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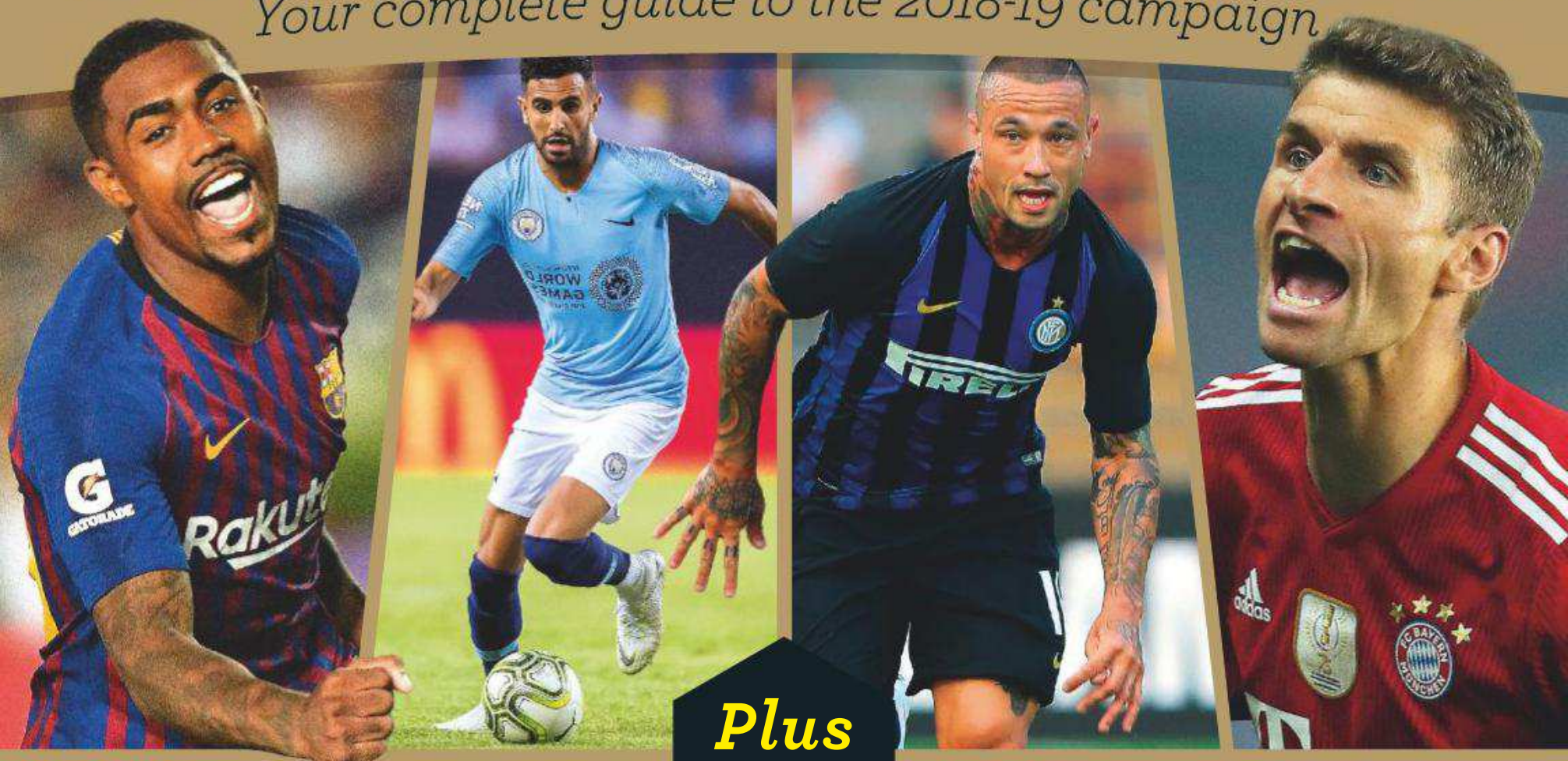

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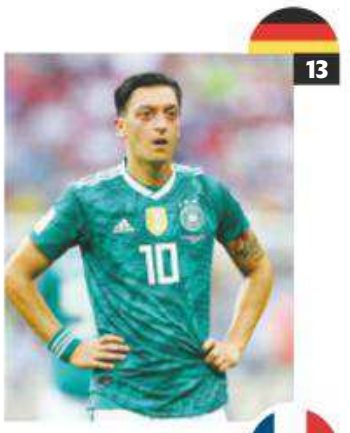

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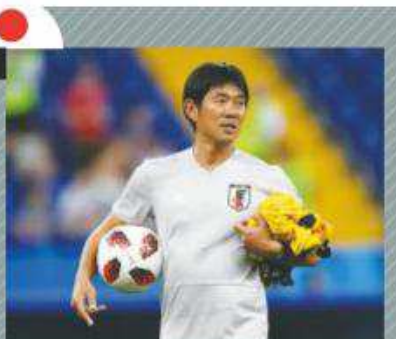

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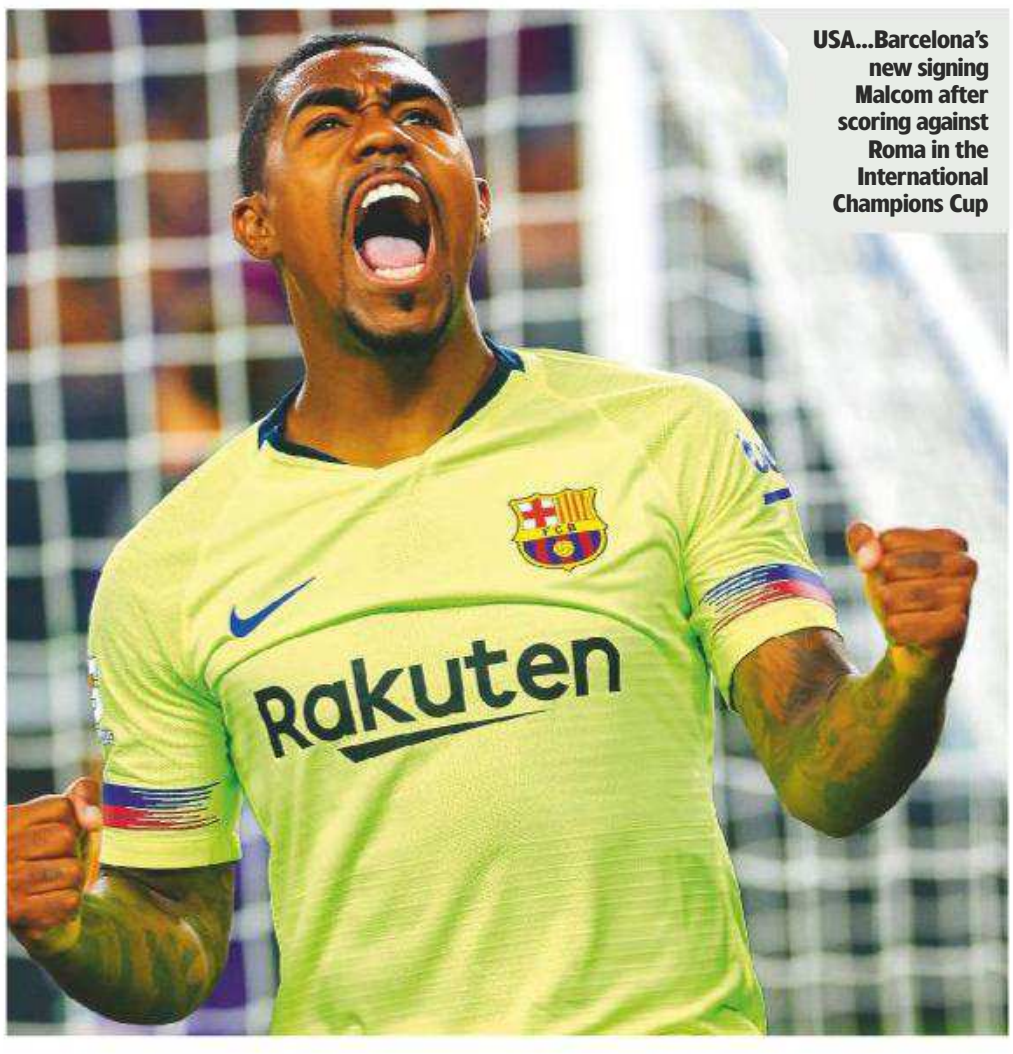

USA...Barcelona's new signing Malcom after scoring against Roma in the International Champions Cup

IRELAND...Patrick Hoban of Dundalk is challenged by Yuriy Tkachuk, left, and Igor Dudarev in the Europa League

JAPAN... Tokyo's Keigo Higashi (right) and Musashi Suzuki of V-Varen Nagasaki compete for the ball during a J.League encounter

GERMANY...Christoph Kramer dives into the Tegernsee after a training session at Borussia Monchengladbach's pre-season camp

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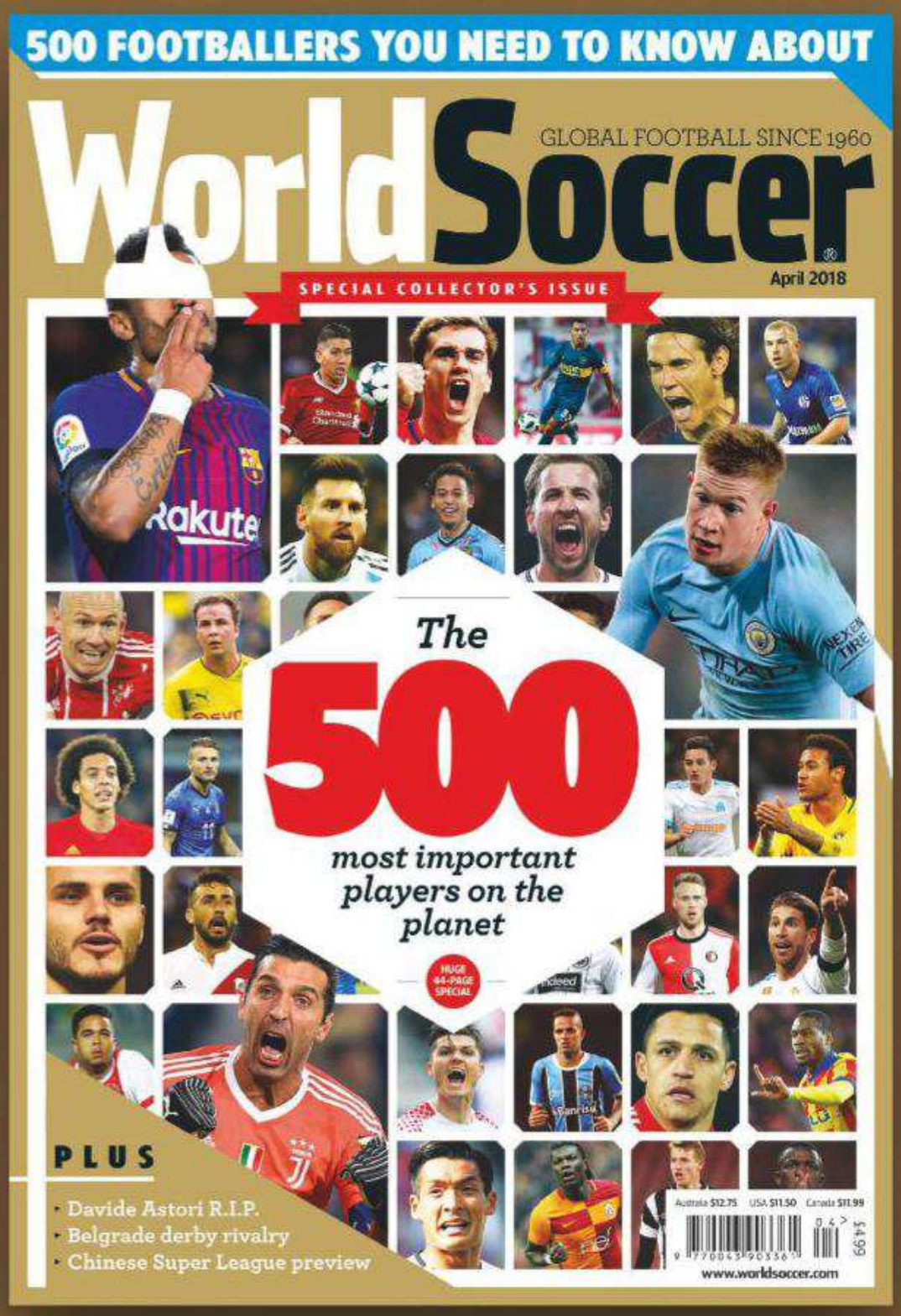

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FROM THE EDITOR

Three weeks on from the World Cup Final and already the European club season is up and running. Cristiano Ronaldo did not wait for the tournament in Russia to finish before landing in Italy. His move to Juventus feels like a significant event; it is certainly being portrayed that way by Italian observers. Serie A has been given a shot in the arm by his transfer, while Real Madrid, masters of the marquee signing, appear to have been caught unawares by his departure.

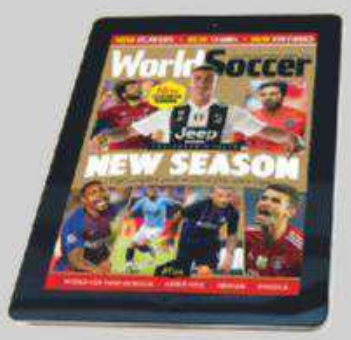
Madrid could yet take advantage of the early closing of the transfer window in England to acquire reinforcements. And it's easy to forget that last season they achieved what no other club had ever done in the Champions League by retaining their title.

> Serie A has been given a shot in the arm by Ronaldo's transfer, while Madrid appear to have been caught unawares

A year is an eternity in football. Less than 12 months ago Neymar was the heir apparent to Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. But after a World Cup in which the Brazilian's play-acting was ridiculed, his reputation has taken a battering.

Whether Neymar can take PSG to the next level in the Champions League is a theme we will turn to next month in our guide to the European club competitions.

See you then.



Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

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2 Mesut Ozil quits international football p13
3 Chelsea hire Maurizio Sarri p36
4 Cristiano Ronaldo boosts Serie A p50
5 All change at Real Madrid p54
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7 Nice hire Patrick Vieira p44
8 Basle exit Champions League qualifiers p57
9 Steven Gerrard plots Rangers revival p53
10 Hallgrimsson quits Iceland p21

FINLAND

Portugal secure Euro under-19 title

Portugal, with a dramatic 4-3 extra-time victory over Italy in the Final, became the first country to win the European under-19 title two years after winning the under-17 crown.

Pedro Correia's 109th-minute winner came seconds after Italy had drawn level at 3-3 in a dramatic finale. Goals from Joao Filipe and Francisco Trincao had put the Portuguese 2-0 in normal time, only for Moise Kean to score twice for Italy to take the game into an extra period. Filipe looked to have won the title with

Outstanding... Italy's Moise Kean

a right-footed shot but Italy equalised again through a Gianluca Scamacca header before Pedro Correia grabbed the late winner.

Coach Helio Silva was in charge of the victorious 2017 under-17 side that contained many of the same players and said: "I want to thank everyone. We put together a solid squad. We built a strong identity.

"They deserve it. It's a unique moment. We are honoured to have represented Portugal.

"These players have the ability to make it in the professional game. I won't say it's a new golden generation but they have the

Final...Portugal's Romain Correia

"There's no question that we had a deal with Malcom, then Barca jumped into the mix unethically and immorally"

Roma president James Pallotta (right) attacks Barcelona for hijacking their deal to sign the Brazilian winger from Bordeaux

Winners...Nuno Santo (left) and Diogo Teixeira

quality to make it at club level."

Silva's side recovered from losing to Italy in the group stage to thrash Ukraine 5-0 in the semi-finals. In the other semi, Italy had overcome highly fancied France, who had beaten the defending champions England 5-0 in the group phase.

Trincao of Braga and Filipe of Benfica finished as the tournament's joint top-scorers. Defensive midfielder Florentino Luis also impressed, along with two English-based players, West Ham midfielder Domingos Quina and Wolves left-back Ruben Vinagre.

Kean, the Juventus forward, was Italy's outstanding player. while Moussa Diaby (Paris Saint-Germain) and Mickael Cuisance (Borussia Monchengladbach) were France's most impressive performers.

Earlier in the summer, Holland beat Italy in a penalty shoot-out to claim the European under-17 title.

HEROES & VILLAINS

Quick...Bradley Wright-Phillips

BRADLEY WRIGHT-PHILLIPS

The striker became the fastest player in history to reach 100 MLS goals when he scored for New York Red Bulls against DC United.

HARDLIFE ZVIREKWI

The Zimbabwe international defender, who had his left hand amputated following a serious car crash in March, returned to competitive action in July, as CAPS United drew 0-0 with Harare City. "I still want to break new ground again, to represent my nation, in my condition, to inspire other people that the impossible can still be achievable if you are determined and hardworking," said the 31-year-old.

Great start...Talisca

TALISCA

The Brazilian celebrated his move to the Chinese Super League from Benfica by scoring a hat-trick on his debut for Guangzhou Evergrande against Guizhou Zhicheng. He followed it up with two in the next game, against Chongqing Dangdai Lifan.

JOSEF MARTINEZ

The Atlanta United forward scored three times against DC United to claim the sixth hat-trick of his MLS career and set a new record for the competition.

RODNEY BROWN

The Crusaders defender scored an own goal in the Champions League first qualifying round against Bulgarian champions Ludogorets at Seaview – after scoring an own goal in the Bulgarian outfit's 7-0 home-leg win.

Disgraced... Salisu Yusuf (right) with Gernot Rohr

SALISU YUSUF

The assistant to Nigeria coach Gernot Rohr, who also doubles as boss of the country's Olympic side, was caught in a sting collecting a $1,000 bribe from an undercover journalist, Anas Aremeyaw Anas, allegedly in exchange for selecting certain players at last year's WAFU Cup and the African Nations Championship in Morocco earlier this year.

Dismissed...New Zealand coach Andreas Heraf

ANDREAS HERAF

The Austrian resigned as New Zealand women's coach after 13 players refused to play for him. According to *The New Zealand Herald*, the players had written to the federation about "bullying, intimidation and a culture of fear".

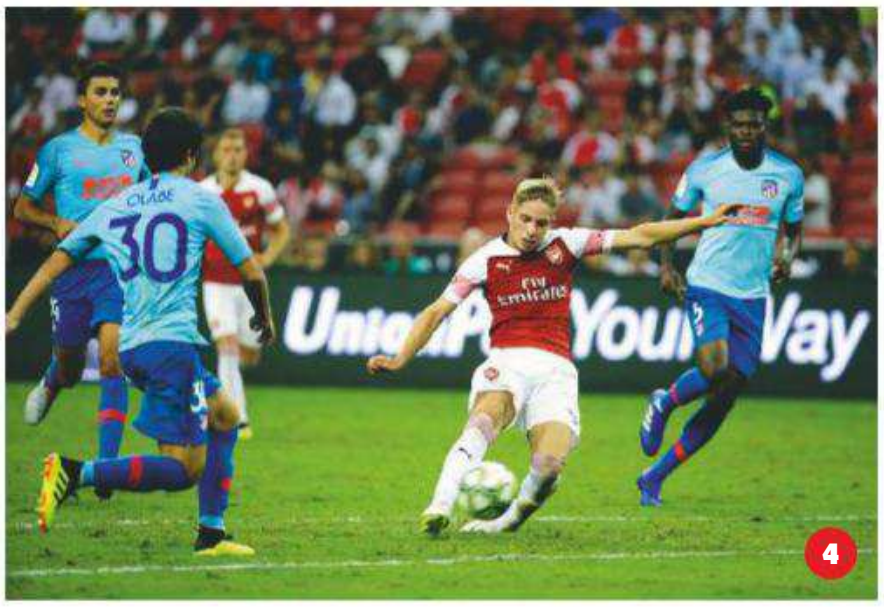
TORPEDO MOSCOW

The third-tier Russian side scrapped plans to sign defender Erving Botaka-Yobama but denied doing so because he is black. Torpedo faced fan protests after announcing the signing of the 19-year-old. who is of Russian and Congolese descent – and said the deal had been cancelled for financial reasons.

"You asked me 10 times the players I'd like to start or not. I never gave you a name. Tell me in front of everyone that I gave you someone's name"

Lionel Messi's reported dressing-room challenge to Jorge Sampaoli over the coach's suggestion that the player picked Argentina's team at the World Cup

GOALS we'd like to see again

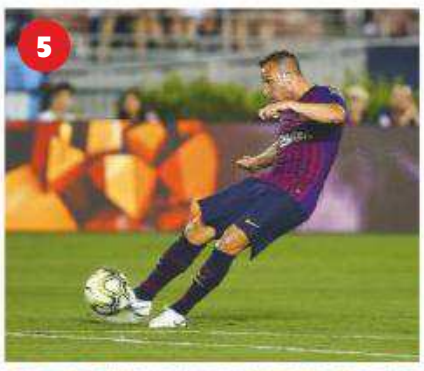


1 LUCAS PRATTO
River Plate v Villa Dalmine
Sublime finish as he chips the goalkeeper with the outside of his boot in an Argentinian Cup tie.

2 XHERDAN SHAQIRI
Liverpool v Manchester United
Spectacular overhead kick on the Champions Tour to score his first goal for Liverpool.

3 ROGELIO FUNES MORI
Monterrey v Leon
Lobs the backtracking keeper from 40 yards out.

4 EMILE SMITH ROWE
Arsenal v Atletico Madrid
Dribbles past two defenders before finding the top corner of the net in pre-season friendly in Singapore.



5 ARTHUR
Barcelona v Tottenham
Receives the ball on the edge of the area and rolls the sole of his boot across it before firing an unstoppable shot into the top corner.

6 EVERTON
Flamengo v Recife
Wrong-foots his marker and curls home a left-foot shot from the edge of the penalty area.

WINNERS

PORTUGAL
Completed a unique double by adding the Euro Under-19 Championship to their under-17 title.

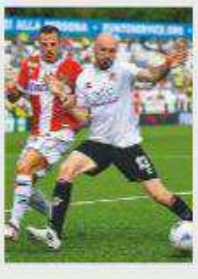
JORGE MENDES
The Portuguese agent earned a reported €20m for his role in Cristiano Ronaldo's transfer to Juventus.

MANCHESTER UNITED
The newly formed women's team was accepted for membership of the second-tier Women's Championship.

LOSERS

BEN DAVIS
Singaporean with Premier League Fulham who has not been allowed to defer his mandatory military service.

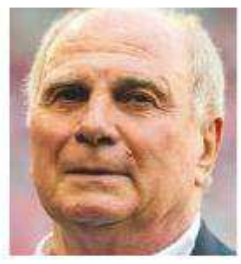
PARMA
Start the Serie A season on minus five points after striker Emanuele Calaio was found guilty of match-fixing.



ENGLAND
The defending champions were thrashed 5-0 by France and lost 3-0 to Norway in the Euro Under-19 Championship.

"He had been playing shit for years. He last won a tackle before the 2014 World Cup"

Bayern Munich president Uli Hoeness (right) is no fan of Mesut Ozil



Headliner: Mesut Ozil

Caught in a political storm

Midfielder quits national team in racism row

A long-term fixture for Germany and very much the personification of the imaginative play that *Bundestrainer* Joachim Low insists on, Mesut Ozil has stirred up a hornet's nest with his decision to quit the *Nationalmannschaft*.

In an eloquent, elaborate three-part announcement on social media, the 29-year-old pulled no punches, forcibly arguing that his German-Turk background had rendered him a target for "racism and disrespect".

Ozil feels he was singled out as the patsy for Germany's World Cup debacle this summer and is particularly resentful at the way his springtime photo shoot with Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan was portrayed in the media, with the controversy never dying down and some fans of the opinion he was not committed to the cause.

"I'm a German when we win and an immigrant when we lose"

"For me, having a picture with president Erdogan wasn't about politics or elections," declared Ozil, who has been capped 92 times and was a World Cup winner in 2014. "It was about me respecting the highest office of my family's country. My job is to play football, not to be a politician. Our meeting was not an endorsement of policies.

"Like many people, I've roots in more than one country. While I grew up in Germany, my ancestry is in Turkey. I've two hearts: one German, one Turkish.

"What I can't accept are German media outlets repeatedly blaming my dual-heritage and a simple photo for a bad World Cup on behalf of an entire squad. Newspapers are trying to turn the German nation against me. I used to wear the German shirt with pride and excitement but now I don't.

"I feel unwanted and believe that my achievements since making my national debut in 2009 have been forgotten."

Much of Ozil's ire was aimed directly at Reinhard Grindel, the president of the German federation (DFB).

When the Erdogan furore first broke in May, Grindel initially backed national coach Low's decision to select Ozil for Russia 2018. But after their title defence spectacularly disintegrated, the DFB chief was heard singing a quite different song, pointing the finger at the playmaker and claiming Ozil – who up to that point had not passed public comment on the affair – owed an explanation to the fans.

Is Ozil the establishment's convenient choice of fall guy? The man himself clearly thinks so.

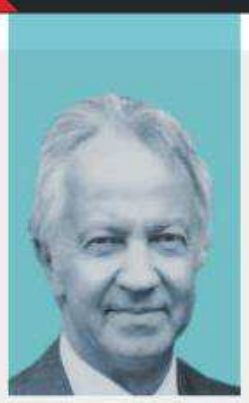
"In the eyes of Grindel and his supporters I'm a German when we win and an immigrant when we lose," said the Arsenal midfielder. "I'm very disappointed but not surprised by Reinhard Grindel's handling of all this. In 2004, as a representative in the German parliament, [he] claimed that 'multi-culturalism was a myth and a lifelong lie'.

"People with racially discriminative backgrounds should not be allowed to work in the largest football federation in the world, one that has many players of mixed lineage. I won't stand for being a scapegoat for his incompetence and inability to do his job properly."

Stung by Ozil's incendiary critique the DFB announced that they "emphatically reject" any allegations of racism. Shame Germany's most talented player of his generation thinks otherwise.

Nick Bidwell

Controversy... presenting an Arsenal shirt to the Turkish president



Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Qatar in the firing line

Vision...an artist's impression of the Al Rayyan Stadium

Be prepared! The coming months and years will see a renewal of hostilities over the staging of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar; hostilities which were put on ice as Russia 2018 commanded wall-to-wall media space.

However, the coming firestorm will no longer concern construction-workers' conditions, date switches and how the Qataris won the hosting rights back in December 2010.

All of these are old themes, with the International Labour Organisation accepting progress which would have been impossible without World Cup leverage, while the winter staging is now generally accepted.

As for the awarding of hosting rights, even long-time critics agree that, with little more than four years to go, it is now too late to change. The legal costs alone would be astronomical, never mind the work already undertaken. In addition, FIFA's recent award to the United States, in partnership with Canada and Mexico, of the expanded 2026 World Cup tournament has defused any lingering issues of hosting envy.

However, the one headlining challenge every host nation must suffer is the over-the-top, critical media attention that can border on paranoia. Here Qatar remains vulnerable on three other fronts.

Firstly, the availability of accommodation is an issue. Russia, for example, welcomed more than one million fans to its World Cup this summer. And that was fine in a vast country which spread the matches across 11 cities. But Qatar has just one city, Doha.

Secondly, Qatar's own national team remain uncompetitive on the grand stage. Few European teams have featured in their schedule of friendly matches and they have never come close to the World Cup finals, so their performances at next year's Asian Cup and Copa America will come under heavy scrutiny.

Thirdly, and most importantly, Qatar is subject to an economic and political boycott led by neighbours Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. They are demanding – among a host of issues – that Qatar cut diplomatic ties with Iran and shut down the broadcaster Al Jazeera.

Supporting action has seen the emergence of a Saudi-based pirate satellite broadcaster beoutQ which has not only undercut beIN's World Cup coverage but also the UEFA Champions League and other major sports events. If allowed to continue this threatens the entire financial foundation of world sport.

More obvious in the western-media landscape has been the launch of a virulent anti-Qatar campaign of press releases and critical "planted" stories. The campaign began shortly before the World Cup in Russia and is now being ramped up.

This is not to suggest that the latest anti-Qatar splurge in *The Sunday Times* was planted. However, it was not only flimsy but based, apparently, on the claims of a PR company justifying its – doubtless million-dollar – promotional contract with the Qatar 2022 bid organisers.

Whether or not there is more to come from this source, more is certainly on its way in terms of anti-Qatar headlines. Short of military intervention it is hard to see the Qataris giving up the finals. After all, they will have noted Russia's incalculable PR benefit from 2018.

> The one challenge every host nation must suffer is over-the-top media attention that can border on paranoia

All the marketing agencies in the world could not have delivered the feel-good factor about Russia promoted around the planet by this summer's World Cup.

This, by the way, is one reason why so many countries are already queuing to bid for 2030 and even 2034.

Whatever the state of FIFA, the World Cup is in a class of its own, even beyond the Olympic Games.

Valcke pays a heavy price

Just over five years ago, on the eve of the Confederations Cup in Brazil, Jerome Valcke was talking about how much he was looking forward to the finals in Russia. If only he had known then what he knows now.

Barely two weeks after France's victory over Croatia in Moscow, the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) rejected an appeal by the 57-year-old Frenchman against a 10-year ban from football imposed by FIFA's ethics committee.

Back in Brazil in 2013, Valcke was riding high after six years as secretary-general of FIFA. He had strong-armed South Africa into proving itself to be an acceptable host for the World Cup in 2010 and was achieving the same stressful trick in South America – although not without more than a few cross words, including a warning that the Brazilians needed "a kick up the backside" to come up to preparatory speed.

Whatever else he was up to, Valcke accomplished an excellent job in both cases, having no compunction about treading on a lot of sensitive toes. It was his experience with South Africa and Brazil which prompted his other most notable statement about looking forward to Russia 2018.

Conceding that he may have sounded "crazy", Valcke said: "Less democracy is sometimes better for organising a World Cup. When you have a very strong head of state who can take decisions, as maybe president Putin can do in 2018, then it is easier for organisers than in other countries where you have to negotiate at different levels of administration."

Proof of the pudding? Russia was the most efficiently organised World Cup since Germany in 2006 and, given today's technological, logistical and security complications, it was probably the best of all in most observers' modern memories.

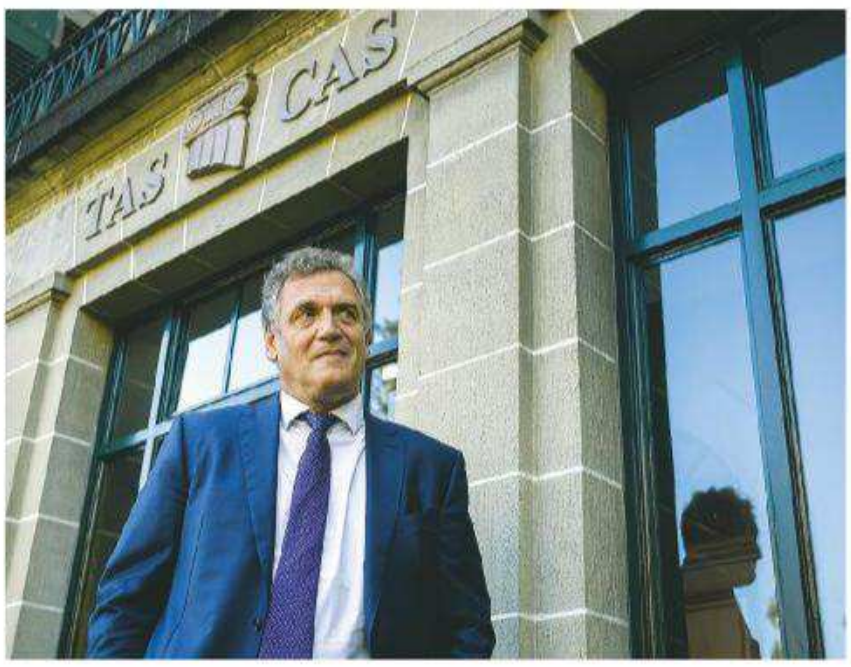
Valcke would have had an easy ride. But by then, of course, he was long gone. He had been mulling over a run for the FIFA presidency when he was suspended in October 2015. He was sacked in January 2016 and banned for 12 years the following month, reduced on appeal to 10 years.

> Whatever else he was up to, Valcke accomplished an excellent job

The charge sheet was damning: plotting the illicit resale of FIFA World Cup tickets, breaching travel-expenses rules, arranging a cut-price TV rights deal, destroying documentation in failing to co-operate with the FIFA investigation. CAS judged the ban and accompanying fine of 100,000 Swiss francs as "wholly proportionate".

Valcke, who now lives in Barcelona where he has set up a promotions and marketing company, has indicated he will appeal again to the Swiss federal court. However, he still faces possible legal action in Switzerland over TV negotiations with Nasser Al Khelaifi, who is the head of BeIN Sports and president of French champions Paris Saint-Germain.

In the meantime, everyone else took the credit for Russia 2018.



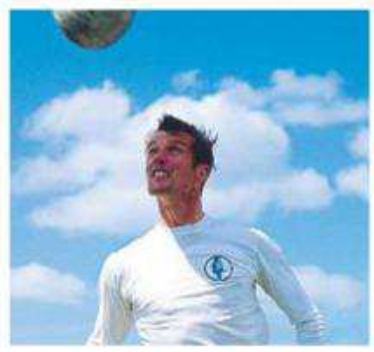
Appeal... Jerome Valcke outside CAS

OBITUARIES

National hero...Roger Piantoni

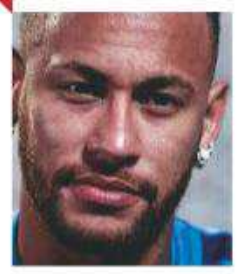
Roger PIANTONI (1931-2018)
The sixth-highest marksman in the history of the French league, with 203 goals between 1950 and 1966, he won the domestic championship three times, the cup once and was a European Cup runner-up in 1959, all with Reims. Having started his career with Nancy, he made his international debut against Ireland in 1952 and was a member of the France side that finished third at the 1958 World Cup in Sweden. He scored 18 goals in 37 games for *Les Blues* before suffering a serious knee injury against Bulgaria in 1959, from which he never regained full fitness. He ended his career with Nice, who he helped gain promotion from the second division.

Paul MADELEY (1944-2018)
One of the most versatile English footballers of the modern era, he played 24 times for England and appeared more than 500 times for Leeds United in their greatest years. A member of the side that won the 1968 League Cup Final, he scored a crucial away goal three years later as Leeds beat Juventus in the Fairs Cup Final.



Versatile...Paul Madeley

Karl SCHMIDT (1932-2018)
Originally a right-winger, the West Germany defender turned down selection for the World Cup in Sweden in 1958 because the finals clashed with his law examinations. He started with Hessen Kassel in regional football before joining Kaiserslautern in 1955 and made his international debut against Yugoslavia that same year. He had won a total of nine caps before he was summoned to a pre-World Cup training camp in May 1958. However, as the camp clashed with his exams he turned down the invitation from coach Sepp Herberger – and never played for his country again.



"Boot stud on the shins. Kick in the spine. Stomp on the foot. You may think I overreact, and sometimes I do, but the truth is I suffer on the pitch. You have no idea what I go through outside of it"

Neymar responds to his critics...in a razor advert

Headliner: Neymar

The fall guy

Star faces struggle to win over diving sceptics

Anyone who loves football will surely hope that Neymar can shrug off his current problems and come back stronger and better. The challenge ahead, however, will not be easy.

The Brazilian's quest to be seen as the world's best player has been blown off course. While Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi are still around, and Kylian Mbappe is on the way up, Neymar is already 26.

And then there is the question of him coming away from the World Cup as a global laughing stock as a consequence of his persistent diving.

Neymar broached the subject in a recent interview, saying: "People were quicker to criticise the one being fouled than the one doing the fouling."

It is possible here to have a certain sympathy for him, as he is obviously more sinned against than sinner. Every time he takes the field opponents are out to stop him, by fair means or foul. But that is the nature of the game. It is a problem that every skilful player has faced since the dawn of the sport. And Neymar and his generation receive a level of protection from bad tackling that would have been unthinkable as recently as 30 years ago.

It is, then, harder to feel sympathy for him when he says: "I can't be the referee and play at the same time, but there are times when I wish I could."

> "I can't be the referee and play at the same time, but there are times when I wish I could"
>
> **How Neymar would improve the game**

Neymar's problem here is that he is trying to operate outside the codes of the game. In his own interpretation, football is a non-contact sport. He has been hothoused through futsal, where a referee has always been present. And Neymar's method of defence is to use the referee. Previous generations, who developed through old-fashioned street football, had a better idea of how to defend themselves by choosing the moment to unleash the dribble. In Neymar's case he often seems to be attempting to draw the foul, frequently in no-man's land where the award of a free-kick does not benefit his team.

Tostao, a World Cup-winner in 1970, and the wisest voice in Brazilian football, recently gave his thoughts on the matter, writing: "Neymar's behaviour, which in the beginning was full of theatrical gestures aimed at gaining an advantage, so common in Brazilian society, has become automatic. For this reason I am afraid that if he tries to change he will inhibit himself and stop trying to dribble and look for the one-on-one situation.

"I do not want him to keep falling, as a simulator, or to become a normal, predictable player."

And this is the problem Neymar now faces. Can he lose the excesses of his game while still retaining the essence?

His PR team have been working hard to think of ways in which his reputation can be rebuilt. But once he takes the field he is on his own, in front of an audience who will be quick to judge him if he gets it wrong.

This could be the most interesting challenge of his career so far.

Tim Vickery

Tumble...Neymar goes to ground

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Klopp is right: great keepers are gold dust

Lev Yashin was the poster boy of the World Cup: the incomparable goalkeeper, all in black, jumping high to his left to save a shot. It is an indelible image of football history, and Russia has never had a finer and more significant hero than the legend known as the "Black Spider", a player who remains the only keeper to have won the Ballon d'Or.

So perhaps it wasn't merely coincidence that, within days of the tournament ending, Liverpool smashed the world-record transfer fee for a goalkeeper by signing Alisson in a £67million deal from Roma.

Great keepers are gold dust. Their value is immense and a crazy truth of football is that this has rarely been reflected in the money clubs were prepared to pay.

Alisson's fee more than doubled the previous record of £32m paid by Juventus to acquire Gianluigi Buffon some 17 years ago.

That is a mere bagatelle compared to the monster inflation of transfer payments for outfield players in the past two decades.

Nevertheless, many critics were swift and loud in damning Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp, accusing him of wildly over-paying for a goalkeeper. But they obviously don't know their football history. Klopp does.

There are countless examples of how crucial goalkeepers have been to glory. For example, the most important signing Brian Clough ever sanctioned at Nottingham Forest was a then mammoth £250,000 deal for England's Peter Shilton.

Within a year Forest had won the league title, Shilton conceding only 18 goals in 37 matches. The next two seasons they won the European Cup.

Alex Ferguson has always understood the diamond value of a world-class keeper and so much of Manchester United's rise to dominance was due to Peter Schmeichel.

> Roma coach Eusebio Di Francesco has claimed that Alisson is "the goalkeeper of the future"

Juventus have surely never spent more wisely than their world record for Buffon, who was instrumental in helping the club win 11 Serie A titles before departing this summer.

Even at the age of 40, Buffon was instantly acquired by Paris Saint-Germain, a club of mountainous ambition. They hope the old man can win them the Champions League.

Liverpool's prime ambition is to win the Premier League for a first time in 28 years. It is the most barren spell without the title in the club's entire history.

Long before the hapless errors by Loris Karius in the Champions League Final, Klopp knew that a world-class keeper had to be brought to Anfield. He knows his history and he had also seen the profound impact on Manchester City last season when they paid more than £30m to sign Ederson, the final and seriously crucial piece in Pep Guardiola's jigsaw.

Ederson is Brazilian but is only the second-choice for his country and stayed on the bench at the World Cup.

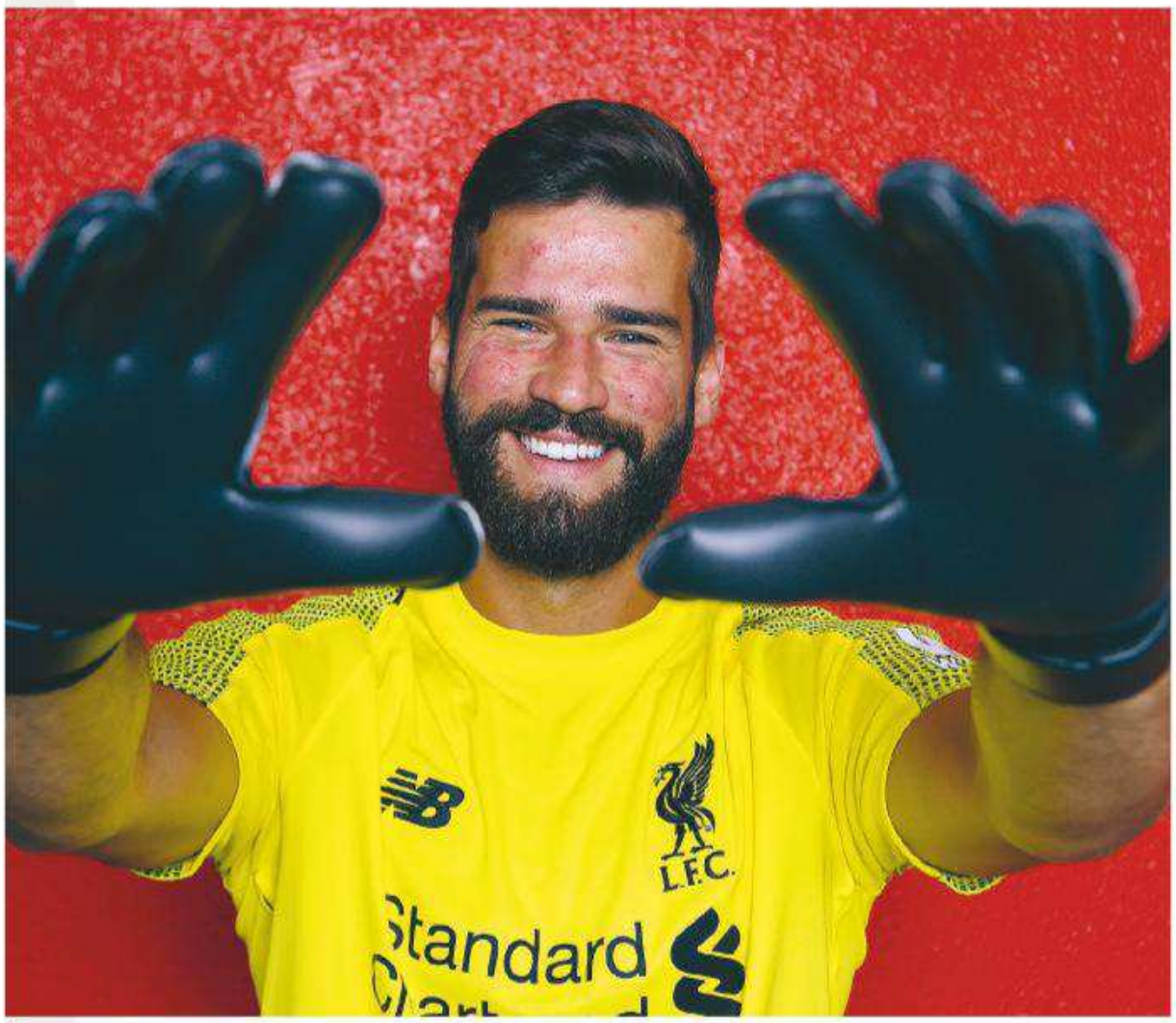
Brazil believe their finest man with the gloves is Alisson, a number one whose composure is often remarkable. A quick search of the web will uncover the moment last season in a Serie A match against Crotone where he did the "sombrero" trick in his own area to go past an opponent.

This is the sublime skill beloved of Ronaldinho in which a player flicks the ball over his opponent and runs round to collect it again. It may seem extravagant and more than a touch crazy, yet the Roma *tifosi* adored Alisson for it.

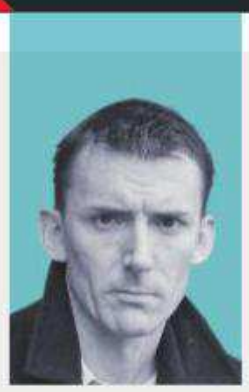
Roma coach Eusebio Di Francesco has claimed that Alisson is "the goalkeeper of the future", but more accurately we might reflect that paying proper transfer fees for keepers is the future.

The summer has been full of speculation about them, including England's admirable newcomer Jordan Pickford, who was such a revelation in Russia. Real Madrid have been actively chasing the signature of Chelsea and Belgium keeper Thibaut Courtois, another to perform with distinction at the World Cup. If they are unable to get him, another likely target is Hugo Lloris of Tottenham Hotspur and new global champions France.

Yes, perhaps it isn't merely coincidence, with the memory of Yashin in mind and the sight of a keeper as the World Cup-winning captain, that the major football clubs are now ready to splash good cash for a No1. WS



World record...Liverpool paid £67million this summer for Roma's Brazilian goalkeeper Alisson



Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Possession is still king

Frustrated...Spain's Jordi Alba can find no way through against Russia

After the early World Cup exits of Germany and Spain, some critics were hailing the death of possession football. And when you consider the four sides that registered the highest possession stats at the tournament – Spain, Germany, Argentina and Saudi Arabia – it doesn't look great for those who seek to dominate the ball. The winners, France, were as low as 18th.

But if possession football has been so irrevocably exposed, how is it that Manchester City won last season's Premier League with a record 66.4 per cent possession? That Barcelona won La Liga with 60 per cent? That Bayern Munich won the Bundesliga with 62.4 per cent? That Napoli, with 60.1 per cent, pushed Juventus harder in Serie A than the champions have been pushed for many years?

Tactical issues are rarely as straightforward as they seem. Just because the two previous World Cup winners – who both prioritised styles of football based around having the ball – had disappointing tournaments this summer does not mean that all styles based around having the ball are finished. There are a lot of issues and assumptions that need unpacking, and perhaps foremost is the idea that the World Cup is much of a gauge of anything in terms of tactical evolution.

Once it was a showcase, with Brazil's success at the 1958 finals alerting the world to the possibilities of the back four. In 1974 "Total Football" became a globally appreciated phenomenon as Holland lost in the Final, then Argentina's victory in 1986 helped popularise the back three. But all of this was before the globalisation of a sport in which everybody can effectively watch everything from everywhere, and before most of the game's greatest talent, both playing and coaching, was concentrated in a handful of countries in western Europe.

> "In 2008, 2010 and 2012 we played at a level and in a style that nobody had done before. Now we're in 2018 and many things have changed"
>
> *Fernando Hierro, Spain's coach in Russia*

Stopped...Bayern Munich (in red) got the better of Barcelona in 2013

What 1958 did was demonstrate to the world what Vila Nova, Flamengo and Sao Paulo had been doing in Brazil for four or five years. By 1974, Ajax had won the European Cup three times. Argentina in 1986 confirmed the possibilities of a formation that Ciro Blazevic at Dinamo Zagreb, among others, had already attempted.

Tactical evolution has always been led by clubs because that's where players spend most time together. Even the one development that can be attributed to a national side, Scotland's invention of passing in 1872, was largely because all their players were drawn from the country's one club side at the time, Queen's Park.

What is true is that possession football has moved on since the time Spain won three tournaments in a row. "In 2008, 2010 and 2012 we had the players we had and we played at a level and in a style that nobody had done before," says Fernando Hierro, who coached the side in Russia. "Now we're in 2018 and many things have changed. Other teams are playing with a [defensive] line of five, which had been forgotten. There are also a lot of direct balls and quick transitions. Everything is changing."

The point about the back five is an indication of how teams have gradually developed strategies to frustrate sides who play in a way inspired by Pep Guardiola's Barcelona and Vicente Del Bosque's Spain. It was something Xavi highlighted at the Euros two years ago when predicting the problems Spain would have in the last 16 against Italy and their 3-5-2 set-up.

"When Italy want to bring the ball up, they have three at the back and two on the wings, for a total of five potential receivers of the ball," said Xavi.

"Pressing the way that Spain like to do becomes really difficult. And playing with two strikers makes things difficult for us up front, too, because both of our central defenders are engaged and one of the full-backs, Juanfran or Jordi Alba, has to push up to close on [Antonio] Candreva or [Alessandro] Florenzi. It leaves us with a three-man

defence. It forces us to change our system to adapt to the opponent, which just makes it all more complicated."

When Russia met Spain at this year's World Cup, Stanislav Cherchesov had his side operate in a 3-5-2, even though it meant leaving out Denis Cheryshev, who had been their most dangerous creative player in the tournament. Spain ended up frustrated, constantly passing sideways and getting nowhere.

The directness of which Hierro spoke is best exemplified by a week in 2013 in which two German sides playing rapid counter-attacking football – Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich – beat two more leisurely Spanish sides – Real Madrid and Barcelona – in the semi-finals of the Champions League. That was the moment Barca's post-Cruyffian style ceased to be hegemonic and became merely one dominant style among many.

In that sense, perhaps the World Cup did perform its function of shining a light

Innovative...Scottish club side Queen's Park

on wider trends, but teams have been coming up with alternatives to Barca's radical possession for a decade now. But did these countermeasures contribute to the downfall of Germany and Spain, whose styles of football are, after all, while possession-based, quite different?

Perhaps, more fundamentally, they both just played badly. Germany were undermined by divisions in the squad and coach Joachim Low's struggle to achieve the right balance between attack and defence. Spain, meanwhile, were undone by the loss of coach Julen Lopetegui on the eve of the tournament, with interim replacement Hierro thrust into an almost impossible position.

Some teams fail because their tactics are outmoded; others fail for more prosaic reasons to do with attitude, external circumstance and preparation. WS

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

1 PIGEON GATECRASHES CUP TIE

The final moments of the recent Scottish League Cup game between Queen's Park and St Mirren were disrupted when a dead animal was dropped onto the Hampden Park pitch from a great height, apparently from a passing seagull.

"We've seen some strange things at Hampden but St Mirren keeper Craig Samson has just been forced to remove what looks like a dead squirrel, dropped onto the pitch by a seagull," Queen's Park announced on their official Twitter feed.

It soon transpired that it wasn't a squirrel, but a pigeon. To add insult to the injury suffered by the bird, Queen's Park lost the tie 5-4 on penalties.

Nascar ride... Jadon Sancho

Fatality...at a Scottish League Cup tie

2 HUESCA DEFEND SIGNING

Newly promoted La Liga side Huesca have defended their loan signing of Ruben Semedo, who is awaiting trial on charges of attempted murder, kidnapping and robbery.

Huesca say they will not be monitoring the defender's behaviour off the pitch and dismissed concerns over his fitness by saying the 24-year-old Portuguese "played a few games in prison".

Semedo joined Huesca from fellow La Liga side Villarreal one week after his parent club confirmed that the player had left prison after posting bail of €30,000.

Semedo, who spent 141 days in detention after being arrested in February, joined Villarreal last summer in a €14m transfer from Portuguese club Sporting.

3 DORTMUND TRIAL NASCAR

Pre-season tours bring many off-pitch ventures for the modern footballer. And while Borussia Dortmund were taking part in the International Champions Cup tour of the USA they were invited to a Nascar test run on the famous Charlotte Motor Speedway in North Carolina.

Marco Reus and Jadon Sancho were the lucky players involved.

4 THE RE-NAMING GAME

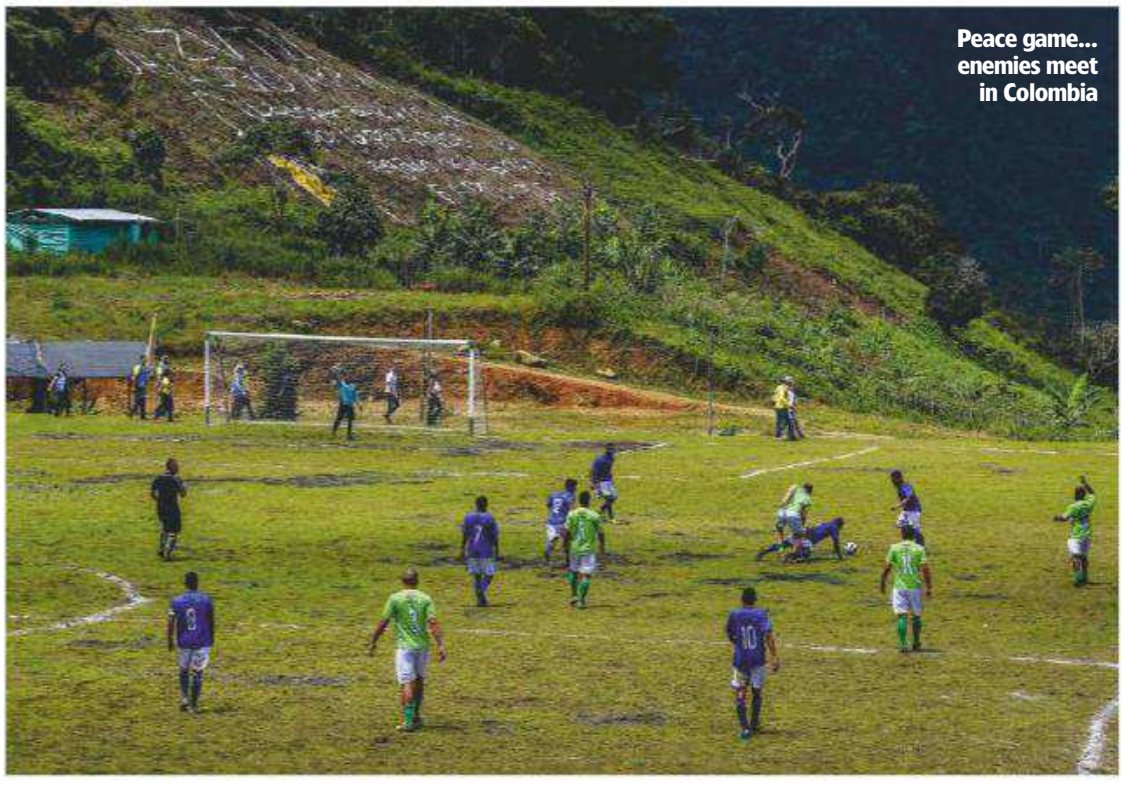
Much was made of the renaming of Southgate tube station in London as Gareth Southgate station, following the England manager's achievement's at the World Cup.

And winners France followed suit, naming two stations on the Paris Metro after their victorious coach and captain. Notre Dame des Champs was temporarily changed to Notre Didier Deschamps, while Line 2 station Victor Hugo was renamed Victor Hugo Lloris.

5 COLOMBIA AT PEACE

In a throwback to the famous occasion in 1914 when the war stopped on Christmas Day for British and German soldiers to play football, something similar happened in Colombia.

FARC and ELN guerrillas, and former right-wing paramilitaries, played a match after watching Colombia's opening game at the World Cup against Japan together on television.



Peace game... enemies meet in Colombia

"This is not about compensation but the principle of making a stand when the actions of one Premier League club completely undermine and cause intrinsic damage to a fellow club"

Watford are still unhappy about their former manager Marco Silva joining Everton

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Coaching appointments across Europe

A country-by-country guide to the new men in charge

AUSTRIA
Austria Vienna appointed Thomas Letsch, while Sturm Graz hired Heiko Vogel.

BELGIUM
Cercle Brugge appointed Laurent Guyot, Michel Preud'homme returned to Standard Liege and Yannick Ferrera joined Waasland-Beveren.

BULGARIA
CSKA Sofia hired Nestor El Maestro. At Ludogorets, Paulo Autuori was announced as director of football but was presented as coach after the departure of Dimitar Dimitrov.

CYPRUS
AEK Larnaca appointed former Athletic Bilbao defender Andoni Iraola.

DENMARK
Hobro hired Allan Kuhn to replace Thomas Thomasberg, who joined Randers. OB appointed Jakob Michelsen.

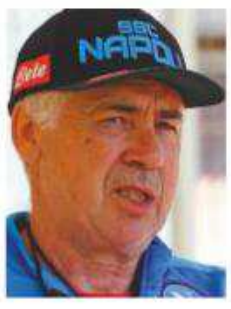
ENGLAND
Arsenal announced Unai Emery as their new head coach to succeed manager Arsene Wenger, while Chelsea hired Maurizio Sarri in place of Antonio Conte. Marco Silva joined Everton and Manuel Pellegrini took charge of West Ham United.

FRANCE
Caen appointed Fabien Mercadal, Nantes hired Miguel Cardoso and Alain Casanova took charge of Toulouse. Nice appointed Patrick Vieira and PSG confirmed Thomas Tuchel as their new boss.

Fenerbahce ...Phillip Cocu

Austria Vienna... Thomas Letsch

Napoli...Carlo Ancelotti



GERMANY
Bayern Munich announced Niko Kovac to replace Jupp Heynckes, while Borussia Dortmund hired Lucien Favre. Eintracht Frankfurt appointed Adi Hutter and RB Leipzig put Ralf Rangnick in charge.

GREECE
Marinos Ouzounidis moved to AEK from Panathinaikos.

HOLLAND
Vitesse announced Leonid Slutsky as their new coach, Groningen appointed Danny Buijs and Heerenveen hired Jan Olde Riekerink. Heracles appointed Frank Wormuth, NAC Breda hired Mitchell Van der Gaag and PSV hired former midfielder Marc Van Bommel.

ITALY
Bologna hired Filippo Inzaghi, Cagliari appointed Rolando Maran and Napoli turned to Carlo Ancelotti to replace Maurizio Sarri. Roberto De Zerbi joined Sassuolo and Udinese hired Julio Velazquez.

POLAND
Lech Poznan appointed Ivan Durdevic.

PORTUGAL
Sporting appointed Jose Peseiro, Guimaraes hired Luis Castro from Chaves, who replaced him with Daniel Ramos from Maritimo, who appointed Claudio Braga. Portimonense hired Antonio Folha, Rio Ave appointed Jose Gomes and Vitoria Setubal hired Lito Vidigal.

RUSSIA
Zenit hired Sergei Semak from Ufa, who replaced him with Sergei Tomaro.

SCOTLAND
Livingston appointed Kenny Miller, Rangers hired Steven Gerrard and St Mirren appointed Alan Stubbs.

SERBIA
Radnicki Nis appointed Nenad Lalatovic.

SPAIN
Sevilla hired Pablo Machin from Girona, who appointed Eusebio Sacristan. Espanyol recruited Rubi from Huesca, who appointed Leo Franco. Athletic Bilbao turned to Eduardo Berizzo, while Celta Vigo hired Antonio Mohamed. Leganes appointed Mauricio Pellegrino and Real Sociedad hired Asier Garitano. Real Madrid recruited Julian Lopetegui.

SWITZERLAND
Young Boys turned to Gerardo Seoane, while Basle chose Alex Frei as an interim boss. Grasshoppers hired Thorsten Fink, Lugano appointed Guillermo Abascal, Lucerne recruited Rene Weiler and Sion hired Maurizio Jacobacci.

TURKEY
At Fenerbahce, Phillip Cocu replaced Aykut Kocaman, while Bursaspor appointed Mustafa Er and Trabzonspor hired Unal Karaman.

Dortmund... Lucien Favre

"After considering this for some time, we decided that Kare had to go. Despite some good results, we feel the development of the club has not been good enough"

Rosenborg chairman Ivar Koteng on why the Norwegian club sacked coach Kare Ingebrigtsen (right)

Appointments, sackings and loans

Deal...Tite

SOUTH AMERICA

Without a club since leaving China's Guangzhou Evergrande in November, **LUIZ FELIPE SCOLARI** was appointed coach of Brazilian side Palmeiras for a third time.

TITE agreed a new deal to coach Brazil until the 2022 World Cup.

CONCACAF

HERNAN DARIO GOMEZ, who left Panama after taking them to a first-ever World Cup finals, was named coach of Ecuador.

Paraguayan **JOSE CARDOZO** replaced Matias Almeyda as coach of Mexican club Guadalajara.

AFRICA

FAOUZI BENZARTI quit as coach of African club champions Wydad of Morocco to take charge of Tunisia for a fourth time.

Chivas job... Jose Cardozo

Belgian **TOM SAINTFIET** was named coach of Gambia's national side and **ABRAHAM MEBRATU** was appointed national coach of Ethiopia.

ASIA

Assistant to Akira Nishino at this summer's World Cup, **HAJIME MORIYASU** took charge of the senior national side.

Former Legia Warsaw coach **ROMEO JOZAK** became boss of Kuwait's national team.

CHAN YUEN TING, who in 2016 became the first woman to lead a men's team to a national league title, returned to coach Hong Kong side Eastern.

Ex-Japan captain **TSUNEYASU MIYAMOTO** replaced Levir Culpi as coach of Gamba Osaka.

Retiring...Rafa Marquez

EUROPE

Rosenborg of Norway sacked coach **KARE INGEBRIGTSEN** six days before a Champions League tie against Celtic.

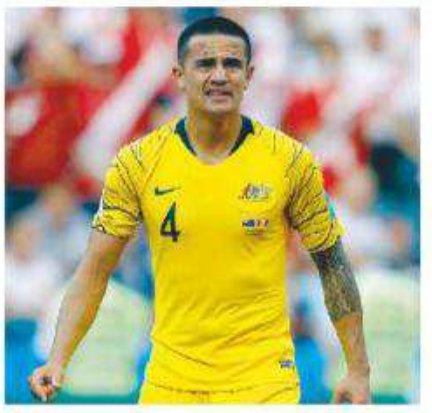
RAPHAEL WICKY left Basle after the Swiss club lost to PAOK in the Champions League qualifiers.

Defeat in the Europa League cost **DELIO ROSSI** at Levski Sofia and Sparta Prague's **PAVEL HAPAL** their jobs.

ASIA

After competing in his fourth World Cup, **TIM CAHILL** – who is Australia's leading scorer with 50 goals in 107 games – announced his international retirement, at 38.

Former Portugal boss **PAULO BENTO** left his job as coach of Chinese Super League side Chongqing Lifan.



Top marksman...Tim Cahill

Off...Paulo Bento

CONCACAF

Mexico's **RAFA MARQUEZ**, who this summer became only the third player to appear at five World Cups, retired as a player at the age of 39.

Having led the national side to the last 16 of the World Cup in Russia, **JUAN CARLOS OSORIO** stood down after three years as coach of Mexico.

Over...Heimir Hallgrimsson

Hallgrimsson steps down as Iceland boss

HEIMIR HALLGRIMSSON, who led Iceland at their first-ever World Cup finals this summer, stepped down as national coach.

Having worked for the federation for seven years, initially as assistant coach, he is expected to return to his former job as a dentist.

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

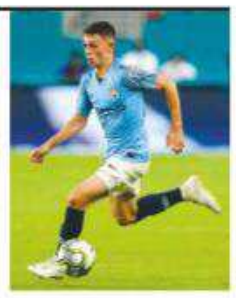
Plenty of talent – but where will they get the chance?

There will clearly be much competition this season for places in the Chelsea midfield. Jorginho will plainly be an automatic choice, having been so expensively signed from Napoli, and the Italo-Brazilian represents a formidable capture. But what of the other places?

Ross Barkley is raring to go, his expensive transfer from Everton having so far been nullified by injury, but now he has apparently got himself fully fit again and there has never been any doubts about his talents. He already has numerous England caps, although Roy Hodgson used to criticise his alleged tendency to run out of position.

With Maurizio Sarri in charge and Chelsea seemingly committed to a more open and adventurous game, Barkley should find matters more agreeable.

He has trained hard and well and is convinced that he has put his physical problems behind him. And he is pleasingly generous about the teenaged players who have lately been coming through.



City youngster... Phil Foden needs to play regularly

"It is very exciting and you see that with the younger groups," says Barkley. "They're winning World Cups and doing very well with developing players differently. You can see the quality and confidence that they have got to give in the future. In the next World Cup and next Euros there may be even more talent mixed in with experience."

In an ideal world, yes, But, desperate for success, the major clubs largely go out and buy all too frequently abroad, to the detriment of whatever youngsters

they may have developed.

A recent example is that of Liverpool youngster Ben Woodburn, who on first appearances as a 17-year-old attacker showed remarkable poise and ability. But as the club pay a huge fortune for new talent, off he goes on loan to Sheffield United in the Championship.

And what is going to happen to that other young Chelsea star, the towering Ruben Loftus-Cheek? Absurdly underused by Gareth Southgate in the World Cup, he was at last given a full chance in the third-place match in which he excelled, twice praised generously by none other than that former Titan of midfield, Glenn Hoddle.

Last season Chelsea sent him out on loan to Crystal Palace, where he excelled. And now? He appears to be back at Stamford Bridge, but how much opportunity will he have there, in the era of Jorginho, not to mention the ever effective Cesc Fabregas?

Manchester City, in Phil Foden, and Arsenal both have bright young stars, but how much opportunity will they have?

In the case of Foden, it will surely be best to lend him out to a major club where he would have regular football.

Keen...Chelsea's Ross Barkley (in blue) challenges Matteo Guendouzi of Arsenal

Motty would not have made BBC blunders

It is good to know that my old friend John Motson, retired from the BBC, has found a berth with a commercial radio station.

He would hardly have been capable of the appalling gaffe by the jokey Guy Mowbray, who commentated the World Cup Final for the BBC and insisted on referring to somebody called "ZAK-allo", referring, of course, to a figure who has been a player, a World Cup-winning left-winger and a successful manager, who has been with us since the World Cup finals of 1958. True, in recent years, he has decided to add an extra "L" to his name, but that has made no difference to its pronounciation, Mario ZAG-allo.

Legend...Mario Zagallo

Could not anyone at the Beeb put the poor blundering fellow right?

Golden Boot winner Kane is no patch on Lineker

Six goals... Harry Kane

Harry Kane duly won the Golden Boot as the World Cup's top scorer, but by comparison with the achievements of Gary Lineker in Mexico, who also scored six goals, it was insignificant. Gary scored his from open play, too many of Kane's came from the penalty spot.

Was he, in the latter stages of England's progress, hampered by injury? He certainly did not seem to be the same player as he had been and in the third-place match badly missed a chance against Belgium which he normally would have taken.

> "Was Harry Kane, in the latter stages, hampered by injury?"

Overall, it was decent display by England who have found a goalkeeper of the highest order in Jordan Pickford and an excellent defender in the shape of the towering Harry Maguire.

France can be thankful there was VAR in Russia

It was a World Cup which began with much indifferent football but which gathered class and drive in the latter stages. France, who won the Final so well, began dismally, squeezing past modest Australia thanks to a couple of goals validated by VAR – a new system which can hardly be criticised in England when two shameful decisions went against them which would have been nullified by the eye in the sky.

I am referring to the Frank Lampard goal that wasn't against Germany, when his fine shot struck the underside of the bar and clearly went over the line, and, of course, to the most curious "Hand of God" goal scored against England in Mexico and validated by an inexperienced African officiating trio. An Italian critic told me afterwards that he felt the England team were still in a state of shock, like a man who has just had his wallet lifted.

Did France deserve their victory in Russia? Overall, yes. They got better and better as the tournament went on, found a refreshed and refulgent Paul Pogba, and the young player of the whole tournament was the dashing 19-year-old Kylian Mbappe. Here was a discovery indeed, with wonderful pace and control, plus a pleasing desire to drop back deep to help his defence.

France got the better of Belgium who, for me, were overall the best team in the competition with two outstanding players in Kevin De Bruyne and Eden Hazard.

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eye witness

Steve Menary reports

CORSICA

SC Bastia start again

UEFA Cup finalists in 1978 and French Cup winners in 1981, the implosion of Sporting Club de Bastia, when it came, was as bad as many on the island had feared, and a return to former glories will be far from easy.

French League Cup runners-up as recently as 2015, Corsica's most famous club start the new season in the regional fifth tier, having been relegated from Ligue 1 at the end of the 2016-2017 season. With debts of €31 million, players routinely receiving their wages late and a string of unpaid hotel bills from away

Loathed...president Pierre-Marie Geronimi

fixtures, SC Bastia lost their professional status, collapsed and were demoted through the divisions to Championnat National 3 due to financial irregularities.

Under much-loathed president Pierre-Marie Geronimi, SC Bastia were always on the brink financially and rarely liked on the "continent", as mainland France is known on the Mediterranean island.

"Other clubs knew this, and when we tried to sell a player to survive they would know we needed €2m and they'd give us just €2m," says long-serving head of press Jean-Philippe Thibaudeau.

SC Bastia's fall from Ligue 1 has left Corsica with no top-flight representative, and while the island's AC Ajaccio and Gazelec Ajaccio play in Ligue 2, they attract crowds of little more than 3,000. In contrast, Bastia would regularly fill their 16,000-capacity Stade Armand Cesari for games against Paris Saint-Germain and Marseille.

"People come from across Corsica to support Sporting Club de Bastia," says Benoit Tavernoit, who was one of more than 30 people to lose their job after the club collapsed.

"Sporting are the club of Corsica and I feel sorry that people who have been supporting the club for 60 years will not see these big matches again."

For many on Corsica, Bastia's demotion was about more than just punishment for sporting failings. "In the stadiums they called us terrorists," says Thibeaudeau.

For four decades the National Liberation Front of Corsica (FLNC) waged a violent campaign for independence that saw the island's prefect, Claude Erignac, assassinated in 1998. In 2014, the FLNC downed arms, but the island retains a wild reputation that some even trade on. T-shirts showing armed separatists and hand-grenade fridge magnets proliferate on Bastia's seafront, while a small element of SC Bastia's supporters have a reputation for hooliganism. In the team's last top-flight season, Nice striker Mario Balotelli was racially abused and a pitch invasion during a game against Lyon led to a three-game home ban.

But while no one on the north coast of Corsica is defending either incident, they do want to add some context. "Those people on the pitch against Lyon were young people," sighs Guillaume Longo, secretary of fan group Socios Etoile Club Bastia. "They did not know what they were doing, but they were also shouting against Geronimi."

When the club collapsed in July 2017, 11 people came forward with rescue plans but most were deterred by the size of the job. In the end, two Corsican businessmen, Claude Ferrandi and internet entrepreneur Pierre-Noel Luiggi, teamed up to revive SC Bastia.

Luiggi resides in Paris, so Ferrandi, who lives in Bastia, took the presidency, and both are fully aware of the task they have taken on. "People need to love us again," says a glum Ferrandi.

Forty years ago SC Bastia were the pride of France after beating Sporting of Portugal and England's Newcastle United in the UEFA Cup before losing 3-0 on aggregate to Dutch side PSV in the Final.

The club retained support after a terrible disaster at its home ground in 1992, when 18 people died after a stand collapsed during a French Cup semi-final against Marseille, but the intervening years of violence and hooliganism eroded those sympathies.

Veteran...Gilles Cioni

The violence may be over but the calls for greater autonomy are growing. Nationalists won local elections three years ago and last June they took three of the island's four national assembly seats. In December, a new island-wide council was formed.

Leading Corsican clubs such as SC Bastia want to stay in the French system and the local council has helped to rebuild the stadium – known locally as the Furiani after the adjacent train station – to meet top-flight standards.

Clubs in France operate on two levels: a professional operation and an association, and all the associations have a registration number with the national federation which is key to keeping the club alive. And while SC Bastia's professional wing is no more, the association remains.

After Ferrandi and Luiggi came forward, a handful of ex-employees such as Thibaudeau worked for free to revive the club and they were cleared to take the place of their reserve team in Championnat National 3. However,

Furiani...the local train station

Empty...coach Stephane Rossi's press conference isn't exactly busy

with just four players signed up, and loan deals not permitted in the fifth tier, just getting a team together in time was touch and go.

Only one regular player from the 2016-17 campaign remained, and with an eye on moving into coaching, veteran Gilles Cioni joined the new set-up, whose official name is now Sporting Club Bastiais. Ferrandi then made a call to former France under-20 midfielder Gary Coulibahy, who was born in Bastia and began his career with the club but was playing in Greece with Levadiakos after spells with, among others, Monaco and Belgian side Waasland-Beveren.

"I left when I was 22 but Bastia gave me my life, so of course I came," says Coulibahy, who is now 32 and has signed a three-year contract.

Stephane Rossi was recruited as coach from local rivals FC Bastia-Borgo and the ranks were swelled by academy players such as Nicolas Medori, Julien Benhaim and Naoufal Mesbah. Eventually, 16 players were recruited under contract, with another six deemed to be "amateurs", and SC Bastia began their season, albeit a month late, with a 1-1 draw with Le Pontet.

Despite the turmoil, SC Bastia were among the favourites to win group D, but in the end they finished the season in second place behind Marseille Endoume, who had signed up a number of former Olympique Marseille academy players and beat Bastia home and away.

Yet just having a club to support means so much to SC Bastia's followers. Now they can start to focus on the long road back to the top. WS

Skipper...Bastia's Yannick Cahuzac after defeat in the 2015 French League Cup Final

"People come from across Corsica to support Sporting Club de Bastia"

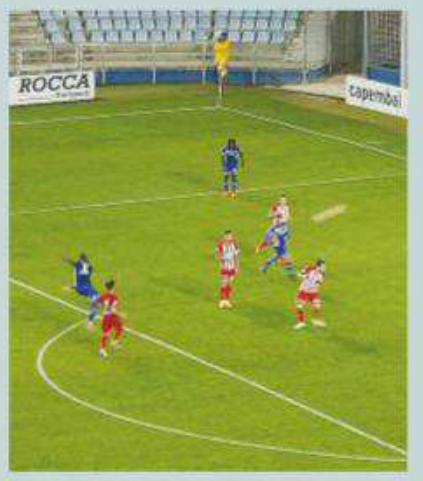
Benoit Tavernoit

Tough financial requirements

Formed in 1990 after the insolvency of 14 leading French clubs in the three previous years, the Direction Nationale du Controle de Gestion (DNCG) assesses the fiscal state of every club in France's top five divisions and those not deemed to have sufficient backing to play in Ligue 1 or 2 have their professional status removed.

SENT PACKING BY THE DNCG

- **Arles-Avignon** Gained promotion to Ligue 1 in 2010 shortly after Arles and Avignon merged but only lasted a season. Stripped of their professional status after successive relegations to the National League.
- **Cannes** Last played in Ligue 1 in 1997-98 and slumped into the National League in 2001-02. Relegated to the fifth tier by the DNCG in 2014.
- **Evian TG** Won promotion to Ligue 1 in 2011 but relegated five years later and went into liquidation.
- **Gueugnon** League Cup winners in 2000 but liquidated in 2011.
- **Grenoble** Liquidated in 2011 with debts of €2.9m just three years after opening a new 20,000-seat stadium. Reformed in the fifth tier and won immediate promotion to the fourth division. Returned to the third level last season.
- **Le Mans** Built a new stadium but were relegated to Ligue 2 before work was completed and never recovered. Liquidated in 2013.
- **Luzenac** Won promotion to Ligue 2 in 2014 but due to the size of their stadium they were forced to release their first team and play in the national leagues again.
- **SC Bastia** Sunk by a €31m debt in 2017. Took the place of their reserve side in the fifth tier last season after belatedly reforming.
- **Strasbourg** Ligue 1 winners in 1979, they slumped into the third tier in 2010 and went into liquidation at the end of the following season. Restarted in the fifth tier in August 2011 and returned to Ligue 1 last season.



Fifth tier...SC Bastia (in blue) and Cannes

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30 eye-catching transfers

Nick Bidwell and *Gavin Hamilton* round up the major deals, left-field moves and off-the-radar surprises

Journey... Alphonso Davies

ALPHONSO DAVIES

1 One of the most remarkable stories of the summer was the incredible rise of Alphonso Davies, the 17-year-old Vancouver Whitecaps attacker who will join Bayern Munich in January after a whirlwind rise over the past six months.

Born in Buduburam, a Ghanaian refugee camp, he moved to Canada at the age of five, eventually settling in Edmonton after his Liberian parents had originally fled their home during the civil war in their west African homeland.

Davies joined the Whitecaps youth programme at the 14, having been spotted playing for Edmonton Strike.

Aged 16, he became the youngest player to represent Canada's national team and this year he has burst on the Major League Soccer scene, with eight assists and five goals up until the end of July, and appearing in the MLS All Stars game against Juventus.

Bayern have secured a deal to bring Davies to Germany at the end of the MLS season. The fee is believed to be in the region of $14million.

Monaco... Aleksandr Golovin

ALEKSANDR GOLOVIN

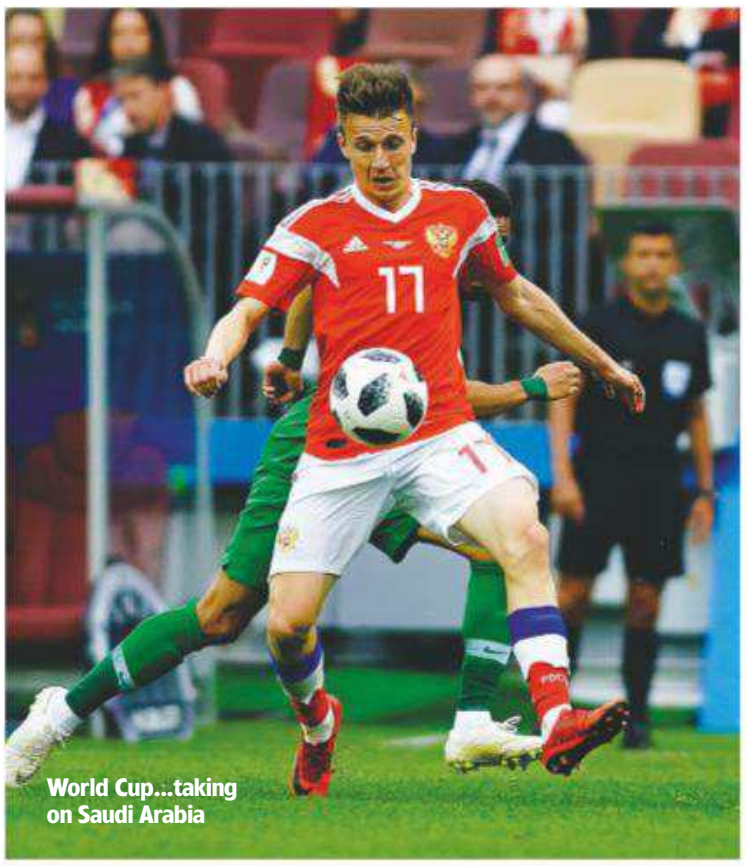
2 One of the stars of Russia's World Cup campaign, he opted to join Monaco after rejecting the chance to move to Chelsea.

Based in tax haven of Monte Carlo, Monaco have always been able to offer financial advantages to potential signings, but this season they could also offer Champions League football, something that Chelsea, who finished outside the Premier League's top four, could not.

"This is a new adventure for me," said the 22-year-old, who started four games and scored one goal as Russia made it through the group and then knocked out 2010 champions Spain in the last 16.

Monaco vice president and chief executive Vadim Vasilyev said there had lots of interest in Golovin from "very large" European clubs.

"Aleksandr has chosen the sporting project of Monaco, which will offer him the best conditions to continue his progress," he added.



World Cup...taking on Saudi Arabia

Fight...Radja Nainggolan

RADJA NAINGGOLAN

3 It's been quite an eventful summer for Radja Nainggolan. The midfielder quit international football after being left out of Belgium's World Cup squad, saying: "Very reluctantly my international career comes to an end.

"I've always done everything I could to represent my country. Being yourself can be bothering. From this day on I will be the first fan."

And as he watched Belgium's passage to the World Cup semi-finals from the sidelines, a deal was being negotiated that would take him from Roma to Internazionale.

"Unfortunately fairytales come to an end, and not always by choice," Nainggolan said cryptically.

The deal valued Nainggolan at €38million, with Inter paying €24m as well as defender Davide Santon and midfielder Nicolo Zaniolo.

The transfer also reunited him with coach former Roma coach Luciano Spalletti, who said: "He is the turbine we were missing from our engine."

"The fact that as soon as he was on the market he chose to come to Inter is an important sign for us.

"He can do well. He has the character to go against any opponent. He is a ninja. He fights with everyone on any field."

RUI PATRICIO

4 One of the most eye-catching moves to the Premier League – not least because it was a free transfer – was the signing by newly promoted Wolverhampton Wanderers of goalkeeper Rui Patricio.

The transfer was announced during the World Cup, where Rui Patricio was on duty with Portugal.

Earlier in the summer, Patricio – a European Championship winner with Portugal two years ago – was one of a number of Sporting players who terminated their contracts in protest at a training-ground protest by their own fans angry at the Lisbon club's performances.

Technically, he was out of contract, allowing him to move for free. But a new regime at Sporting has since filed a complaint to FIFA and the Court of Arbitration for Sport against Patricio and fellow Portugal international Gelson Martins, who signed a six-year contract with Atletico Madrid, and Daniel Podence, who joined Olympiakos.

Reports in Portugal suggest the figure sought by Sporting in compensation could be as much as €197million.

Wolves have suggested that they were prepared to pay up to £20m for the keeper. The matter now looks likely to be settled in court.

Dispute...Rui Patricio

THE LIST

PAULINHO
Barcelona to Guangzhou Evergrande
The Brazilian World Cup midfielder made a surprise return to China, rejoining Guangzhou Evergrande on a season-long loan a year after going to Barcelona in a €40m deal.

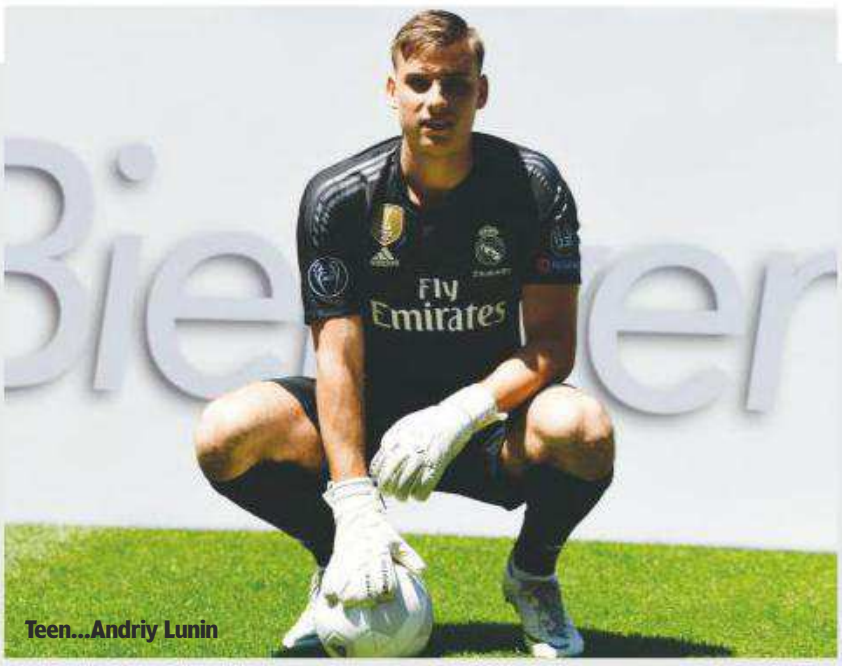
CHRISTIAN CUEVA
Sao Paulo to Krasnodar
The playmaker, one of the stars of Peru's World Cup campaign, remained in Russia, signing for Krasnodar in an €8m move from Brazil's Sao Paulo.

ANDRIY LUNIN
Zorya Luhansk to Real Madrid
In line with their policy of snapping up global talent, Real Madrid signed the teenage Ukrainian keeper who already has two caps for his country, from Zorya Luhansk for a reported fee of €8.5m plus €4m in extras.

YURI BERCHICHE
Paris Saint-Germain to Athletic Bilbao
Just a year after joining PSG from Real Sociedad, the full-back returned to the Basque country, signing for Athletic Bilbao in €24m deal.

LAZAROS CHRISTODOULOPOULOS
AEK Athens to Olympiakos
A few months after playing a leading role in AEK's Greek title triumph, the winger made a controversial switch to Athens rivals Olympiakos on a Bosman.

SAMUEL GIGOT
Gent to Spartak Moscow
The promising 24-year-old French centre-back swapped the Belgian league for Spartak Moscow in an €8m deal.



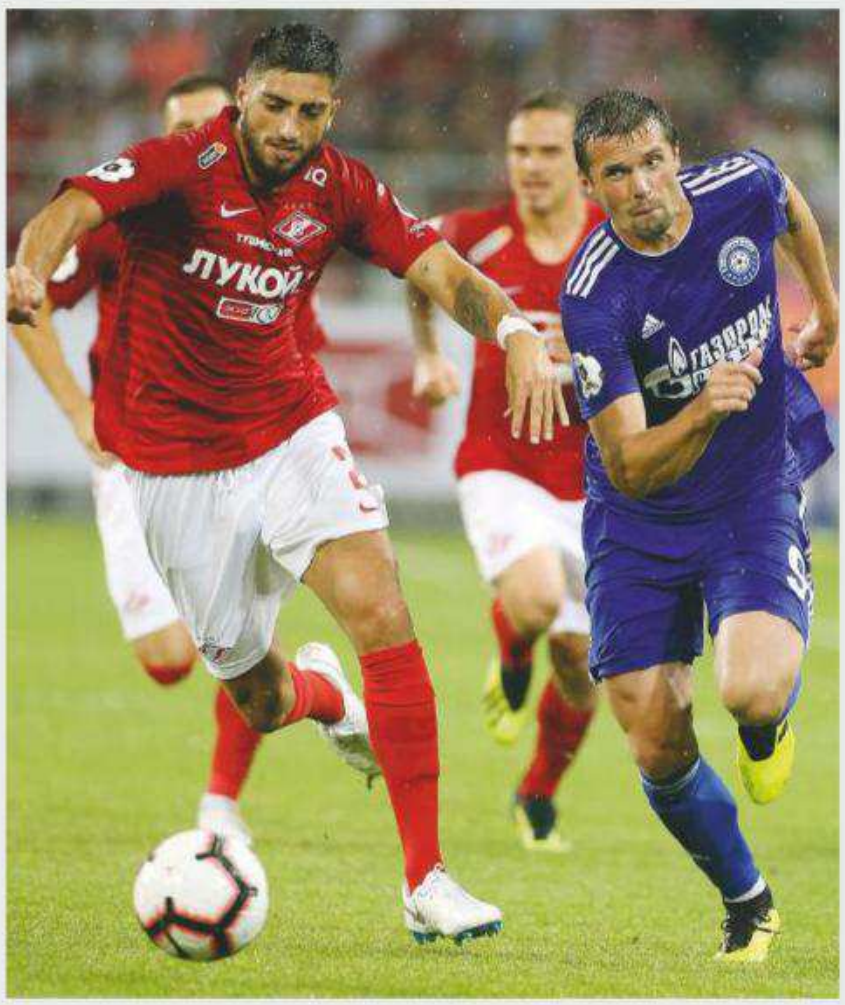
Teen...Andriy Lunin

CLAUDIO PIZARRO
Cologne to Werder Bremen
The veteran Peruvian centre-forward, who will turn 40 in October, signed for Bremen for the fourth time in his career.

THIERRY AMBROSE
Manchester City to Lens (loan)
The highly rated French forward, who spent last season on loan in Holland at NAC Breda, has been sent out on loan again, this time to France's Ligue 2.

LINUS WAHLQVIST
IFK Norrkopping to Dynamo Dresden
The captain of Sweden's under-21 side made a surprise switch to Germany's second tier.

ROBIN OLSEN
Copenhagen to Roma
Roma moved quickly to replace the record-breaking goalkeeper Alisson by signing Sweden's World Cup number one.


Promise...Samuel Gigot (left) in action for Spartak Moscow against Orenburg

HILAL SOUDANI
Dinamo Zagreb to Nottingham Forest
The Algerian attacker, in prolific form in the Croatian league over the past five seasons, made a leftfield move to the Championship.

FELIX PASSLACK
Borussia Dortmund to Norwich City (loan)
Norwich coach Daniel Farke used his Dortmund connections to bring the highly promising Germany under-21 full-back to the Championship for the season.

GABI
Atletico Madrid to Al Sadd
The 35-year-old former Atletico captain left the Europa League winners to link up with Xavi in Qatar.

MAX MEYER
Schalke to Crystal Palace
Palace demonstrated the financial power of the Premier League by snapping up the highly rated 22-year-old on a free after he failed to agree a new contract at Schalke.

MAYCON
Corinthians to Shakhtar Donetsk
Shakhtar's strong links with Brazil continue with the signing of Maycon as the likely replacement for the Manchester United-bound Fred.

LUIS ADVINCULA
Tigres to Rayo Vallecano
The speedy Peru right wing-back, who impressed with his attacking runs at the World Cup, joined newly promoted Vallecano.

ARTURO VIDAL
Bayern Munich to Barcelona
Barcelona completed the €30m signing of the combative Chilean midfielder ahead of other targets that included Thiago Alcantara and Ajax youngster Frenkie De Jong. The signing of Vidal suggests Barca will continue to move away from the pure possession-based football favoured by Pep Guardiola.

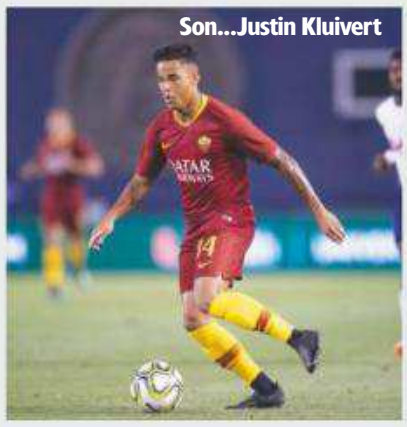
JUSTIN KLUIVERT
Ajax to Roma
The 19-year-old son of Patrick Kluivert agreed a five-year deal with the Italian club for an initial fee of €17m.

FABIAN RUIZ
Betis to Napoli
The Italian club paid the €30m buyout clause in the 21-year-old midfielder's contract to add him to the new-look side being assembled by new coach Carlo Ancelotti.

ALISSON
Roma to Liverpool
Brazil's number one became the world's most expensive goalkeeper after Liverpool – searching for a replacement for error-prone Loris Karius – paid £67m.

DIOGO DALOT
Porto to Manchester United
Jose Mourinho may have been frustrated with United's overall transfer dealings but he claimed that 19-year-old Dalot, signed for £19m is "the best full-back in Europe in his age group".

EDER MILITAO
Sao Paulo to Porto
The Porto transfer machine rumbles on. The Portuguese champions signed the Brazilian full-back as Diogo Dalot's replacement for €4m.


Son...Justin Kluivert

DALEY BLIND
Manchester United to Ajax
The 28-year-old Holland defender rejoined Ajax for £14m fee after four seasons at Old Trafford.

DUSAN TADIC
Southampton to Ajax
The Serbian winger returned to Holland, where he previously played for Groningen, in a £10m deal.

DUJE CALETA-CAR
RB Salzburg to Marseille
Marseille paid Salzburg €19m for the towering Croatian World Cup centre-back.

PAULINHO
Vasco da Gama to Bayer Leverkusen
Leverkusen, so often a gateway to Europe for talented Brazilians, snapped up the teenage forward – whose full name is Paulo Henrique Sampaio Filho – for a reported €20m. The fee was said to be €10m less than his buyout fee due to of Vasco's financial woes.

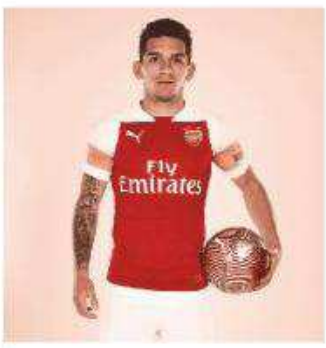
FERNANDO TORRES
Atletico Madrid to Sagan Tosu
The 34-year-old left his boyhood club Atletico after their Europa League victory for a final pay-day in Japan.

Opportunity... Jack Harrison of Manchester City in pre-season action against Liverpool

PLAYERS TO WATCH

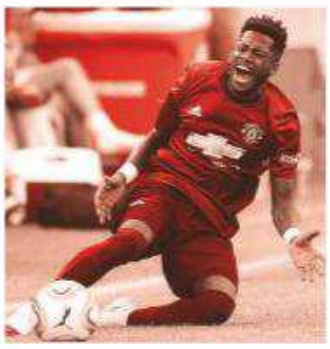
JACK WILSHERE
(West Ham United)
The midfielder left Arsenal after his contract expired and no new offer was forthcoming. Now has a chance to prove his long-term form and fitness at the London Stadium.

JORGINHO
(Chelsea)
One of the outstanding performers in Serie A last year, the Brazil-born Italy midfielder will bring more urgency to Chelsea's passing and pressing game under new coach Sarri.



LUCAS TORREIRA
(Arsenal)
One of a new generation of Uruguayans to feature at the World Cup, the £22m signing from Sampdoria is one of the first arrivals in Arsenal's post-Wenger scouting set-up.

RICHARLISON
(Everton)
The Brazilian burst onto the scene with Watford last season before fading. His former boss Marco Silva is so convinced of his talents he persuaded his new employers to pay £40m.



FRED
(Manchester United)
The Brazilian, who spent five years with Shakhtar Donetsk, is a box-to-box operator in the N'Golo Kante mould who will bring more balance to United's midfield.

Will anyone challenge City?

Can anybody stop Pep Guardiola's Manchester City? Last season, City swept away all comers on their way to the title, breaking records effortlessly and playing some wonderful attacking football.

Able to take a back seat and watch their nearest challengers sweat in the transfer market, City enjoyed a relatively quiet summer after the excesses of recent years – aside from the small matter of Riyad Mahrez arriving from Leicester City for a club record £60million in a deal they had tried to complete in January.

Guardiola's team, even without any further additions, will be the team to beat. So who could challenge?

Across town, the signs coming out of Manchester United are not promising. Jose Mourinho spent most of pre-season moaning about the club's lack of transfer dealings, complaining: "I would like two more players. I don't think I'm going to have two. I think it's possible I'm going to have one.

"I gave my club a list of five names a few months ago. I wait to see if it's possible to have one of these players."

Mourinho made those comments despite spending £55m on Shakhtar Donetsk midfielder Fred and £20m on defender Diogo Dalot from Porto.

The manager's unhappiness may be another of Mourinho's long-favoured ruses to take the heat off his players, but all the signs are that the problems run deeper. Mourinho's long-time assistant Rui Faria has ended their association so this was the Portuguese's first pre-season without him.

Another troubling matter for Mourinho was that a number of United players – Paul Pogba, Romelu Lukaku, Marouane Fellaini, Marcus Rashford – performed well at the World Cup, prompting questions as to why Mourinho, the master motivator, could not get similar levels from them last season.

Mourinho was quick to attack Liverpool's summer spending and that was a recognition that last season's Champions League runners-up could be the most serious title rivals for Manchester City.

Liverpool's acquisition of Naby Keita, Fabinho, Alisson and Xherdan Shaqiri for a total of £167m means Jurgen Klopp has spent more this summer than during his entire seven-year tenure at Borussia Dortmund.

The club's summer spending was partly funded by the remaining proceeds of Philippe Coutinho's January sale to Barcelona. And when you add in the January signings of Virgil Van Dijk and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, Liverpool have by far the most improved squad compared to 12 months ago.

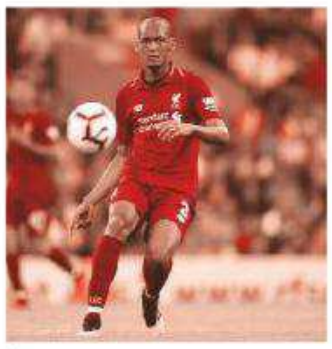
Impressive... Tottenham's new stadium

The most intriguing of the top six – and indeed the most difficult to analyse – are Chelsea, who made the bold appointment of Maurizio Sarri after relations with Antonio Conte broke down irrevocably. The new man faces a struggle to impose his bold playing style on Chelsea, and a lack of Champions League football has proved problematic in attracting and retaining players. Russia midfielder Aleksandr Golovin chose

> Able to take a back seat and watch their nearest challengers sweat in the transfer market, City enjoyed a relatively quiet summer after the excesses of recent years

FELIPE ANDERSON
(West Ham United)
One of the outstanding performers in Serie A in recent seasons, though his form dipped at Lazio last year. West Ham's marquee signing will be given licence to attack.

JOAO MOUTINHO
(Wolverhampton Wanderers)
Quite the coup for newly promoted Wolves, the gifted Portugal midfielder is an experienced and versatile operator who arrives after five seasons at Monaco.



FABINHO
(Liverpool)
Not cheap at £45m, but the Brazilian's versatility – he has played in central midfield and at full-back for Monaco – will give Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp plenty of options.

ALIREZA JAHANBAKHSH
(Brighton & Hove Albion)
The top scorer in the Dutch league last season, he is happiest in a wide attacking role. A record £17m signing for free-spending Brighton who have bought well this summer.

JEAN-MICHAEL SERI
(Fulham)
Along with Andre Schurrle, Fulham pulled off a major coup to sign the Ivorian from Nice after the midfielder came close to joining Barcelona last summer.

Monaco ahead of London, while speculation persists over the future of Eden Hazard and Thibaut Courtois, both targets for Real Madrid.

Italian midfielder Jorginho, also coveted by Guardiola, followed his former boss from Napoli and will be a vital cog in a new-look midfield. It remains to be seen whether Ruben Loftus-Cheek has a future at the club. He played his way into England's World Cup squad last term after enjoying a run of first-team action – the first of his career – at Crystal Palace, and has indicated that he wants to compete for a place at Chelsea, although Sarri has yet to give him the right assurances.

Chelsea's summer was not helped by the late appointment of Sarri, who was not presented to the media until July 18, amid uncertainty over who is calling the shots at the club. Owner Roman Abramovich continues to devolve responsibility to Marina Granovskaia and is likely to be spending less time in the capital and more in Israel following the refusal of his UK visa renewal.

Abramovich pulled the plug on ambitious plans for a redeveloped stadium and the club have yet to appoint a permanent replacement for technical director Michael Emenalo, now at Monaco, who was the architect of the club's controversial but extensive network of talented loanees.

In contrast, across town at Arsenal, a whole new management structure is in place following the end of Arsene Wenger's 22-year tenure. Unai Emery arrives from Paris Saint-Germain with a remit to coach the first team, but power has been devolved to Barcelona's former director of football Raul Sanllehi, the new head of football relations, and Sven Mislintat, the chief scout hired from Borussia Dortmund. Like Chelsea, they face the challenge of combining a Europa League campaign with a bid to return to the top four – though it may take some time before that happens.

North London rivals Tottenham Hotspur are bracing themselves for a return to White Hart Lane but rising stadium rebuild costs have impacted on their transfer business. Club chairman Daniel Levy has a tendency to conduct late negotiations but funds are limited, prompting talk of a swap deal involving Toby Alderweireld and Manchester United's Anthony Martial.

The big six are a class apart from the remainder of the league. Burnley, Everton, Leicester City and Newcastle United will have ambitions to challenge for the Europa League. So too will West Ham United, after an ambitious summer recruitment programme that saw Manuel Pellegrini return to England. The Hammers have made some bold signings, notably Jack Wilshere, Felipe Anderson and Andriy Yarmolenko.

But the likes of Newcastle and even Burnley may yet get dragged into a relegation battle. The lesson from last season – when West Bromwich Albion, Stoke City and Swansea City were relegated – is that failure to reinforce in the transfer market can leave any team vulnerable to the drop. The quality of players signed this summer by promoted sides Wolverhampton Wanderers and Fulham suggests there could be some unpleasant surprises for one or two Premier League regulars come May.

Gavin Hamilton

Bold...Maurizio Sarri

New arrival...Fred (left) and Manchester United team-mate Ander Herrera

> The lesson from last season is that failure to reinforce in the transfer market can leave any team vulnerable to the drop

PROMOTED TEAMS

Record...Neil Warnock

WOLVERHAMPTON WANDERERS
Last season's runaway Championship winners, backed by Chinese money and Jorge Mendes' connections, look strong enough to hit the ground running.

CARDIFF CITY
A record eighth promotion for manager Neil Warnock but, despite owner Vincent Tan restoring relations with the fans since the club's last top-flight campaign four seasons ago, they are likely still to struggle.

FULHAM
The Championship play-off winners are back in the top flight after four seasons and thinking big with the signings of Jean-Michael Seri and Andre Schurrle.

Wolves on their way back

Partnership... Jeff Shi (left) and Jorge Mendes

Could Wolverhampton Wanderers be the strongest team ever to have been promoted from England's second tier to the top division?

After an exceptional Championship title-winning season they strengthened this summer with a series of high-quality acquisitions that raised hopes that Nuno Espirito Santo's side can hit the ground running and make a favourable impression on the Premier League.

Deals for Portugal internationals Rui Patricio and Joao Moutinho, loan moves for Raul Jimenez and Johnny Castro, and a permanent contract for Diogo Jota all point to the heavy – and controversial – influence of agent Jorge Mendes.

It's all a far cry from a few seasons ago when Wolves suffered back-to-back relegations after slipping out of the Premier League in 2012.

Their fortunes changed in 2016 when Chinese company Fosun International purchased the club in a £45million deal. And the link with Mendes was crystalised when Gestifute, the Portuguese players' agency owned and run by Mendes, sold a 20 per cent stake to Fosun. Mendes, however, is not a Wolves director and has only an advisory role to Wolves chairman Jeff Shi.

"I know every rule in the FA book. I think, totally legally, there is not any problems," says Shi. "Jorge is good at judging a player and has given good advice about the way to build a team."

The Football League, which forbids agents to own stakes in clubs, cleared Wolves of any wrongdoing following a complaint by Leeds United owner Andrea Radrizzani.

But the Mendes links run deep. Nuno was his first client as an agent and all the major arrivals at Wolves over the past two years have been strongly linked to Mendes.

> "I know every rule in the FA book. I think, totally legally, there is not any problems"
> Wolves chairman Jeff Shi

Thriving...Diogo Jota

When Nuno arrived in the West Midlands his reputation had taken a knock after an unsuccessful spell at Valencia – a club also dogged by accusations of Mendes' influence.

Amid the controversy, the Portuguese players brought into Wolves have thrived, notably Jota and the outstanding player of last season, Ruben Neves. The former Porto starlet narrowly missed out on Portugal's World Cup squad following his inspirational role in a promotion campaign that saw Wolves collect 99 points and numerous plaudits for their free-flowing football.

Other Portuguese players include Helder Costa, Ivan Cavaleiro and Ruben Vinagre, who was a recent Under-19 European Championship winner.

This summer's additions have given Wolves plenty of hope that the new season will be more than just a struggle against the drop.

Last season all three promoted teams stayed up, albeit thanks to three different factors: managerial guile (Newcastle United), spending power (Brighton & Hove Albion) and team spirit (Huddersfield Town). Arguably, Wolves have all of those, as well as Champions League-quality signings – and none more so than Moutinho, who has been key for Monaco and Portugal in recent seasons.

The danger for Wolves is that they have changed too much, too quickly. The recent success of Burnley and Huddersfield has been predicated on retaining the spine of their Championship teams, while Newcastle have punched above their weight with a team of Championship-quality players.

Left-back Barry Douglas, a regular last season, joined Leeds this summer after being informed he was not part of the club's plans for the new campaign. But sticking with the likes of under-rated centre-back Ryan Bennett may help to ease the transition.

Wolves were league champions three times in the 1950s under Stan Cullis, who called his side "champions of the world" after they beat Hungary's Honved in a 1954 friendly that was a precursor to the launch of the European Cup in 1955.

The current Wolves are some way from the Champions League, but they are on their way back.

Gavin Hamilton

Rookie Van Bommel in pole position

New approach... Mark Van Bommel

It was already written in the stars; it was only a matter of time. Ever since the early days of his playing career, no one doubted that Mark Van Bommel would one day become a coach. Or that it would be with PSV, the club he served for seven years in two spells, scoring 52 goals in 197 games.

The only surprise was the timing. But when Phillip Cocu moved to Fenerbahce, PSV's board did not hesitate to appoint their ex-midfielder.

"Two years ago we started this route with Mark Van Bommel. He is now ready for it," declared general manager Toon Gerbrands. "Mark is a winner when it comes to learning. He's very determined to develop himself."

And the club's new coach could only agree, stating: "You can't direct the moment but I've got the right equipment to start this challenge."

Van Bommel is the latest in what is an interesting strategy from Holland's top three clubs. Former national team-mates Frank De Boer, Giovanni Van Bronckhorst and Cocu have all been appointed as head coaches in recent years despite having little experience. De Boer won four titles at Ajax, Cocu three at PSV and Van Bronckhorst one title and two national cups at Feyenoord.

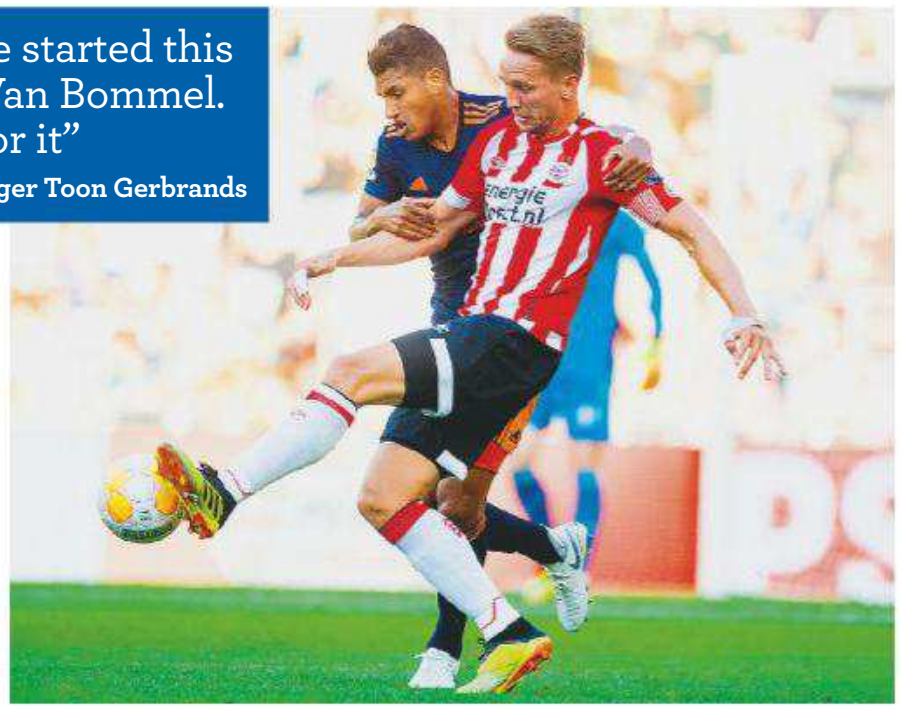
> "Two years ago we started this route with Mark Van Bommel. He is now ready for it"
> **PSV general manager Toon Gerbrands**

The 41-year-old Van Bommel – who also played for Barcelona, Bayern Munich and Milan – coached PSV's under-19s last year and was an assistant to Bert Van Marwijk, his father-in-law, with Saudi Arabia and Australia.

Van Marwijk will be on hand to offer advice to the new PSV coach – and that might not be a bad idea. Two years ago, Van Bronckhorst oversaw Feyenoord's worst-ever run until the experienced Dick Advocaat came in to help him get the team back on track.

One thing is for sure – there will be a change of style in Eindhoven. Van Bommel likes to win at all cost and isn't aiming to top any popularity polls. He will opt for a more aggressive style by putting pressure on opponents' defences. And as a player that opposing fans loved to hate, he won't get a warm reception in the rest of the country.

He will be helped by the fact that keeper Jeroen Zoet and striker Luuk De Jong have decided to stay at the club, as has Mexico's Hirving Lozano – for now.



Staying... Luuk De Jong

Some 85km north in Arnhem, Vitesse have taken a different managerial approach by appointing Leonid Slutsky.

Although the 47-year-old won three championships with CSKA Moscow and was a respected national coach in Russia, his travels to western Europe have not been very successful. His short spell at Hull City could be described as a failure, but that hasn't scared off the Arnhem club's board.

Vitesse, often seen as a satellite club of Roman Abramovich's Chelsea, are under Russian influence and know who they are dealing with. And it was Russian director Valery Oyf, whose intervention was the main reason for previous coach Henk Fraser leaving, who cut the deal.

Referred to as "Hollywood on the Rhine" because the club is so often in turmoil, Slutsky will need all his experience to guide Vitesse to silverware. After all, a club with a 126-year history should have won more than just the 2017 Dutch Cup. But he won't be able to call on Guram Kashia, who has gone to San Jose Earthquakes, while Matt Miazga and last year's sensation Mason Mount both returned to Chelsea.

Even with the arrival of experienced Portuguese goalkeeper Eduardo from Chelsea and Slovakian striker Matus Bero from Trabzonspor it is hard to see Slutsky competing with Holland's top three. And especially now that Robin Van Persie has decided to postpone his retirement for another year at Feyenoord, and Ajax have re-signed Daley Blind from Manchester United and bought Dusan Tadic from Southampton.

With PSV probably having the most balanced squad it could well be another year when the rookie beats the veteran in the Eredivisie.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

Sporting's summer of chaos

At the start of each of the previous five seasons Sporting supporters have harboured real hope that their club, apparently headed in the right direction under president Bruno De Carvalho, was on the cusp of shattering the Porto-Benfica duopoly that has dominated Portuguese football this millennium.

This time round, however, the focus is on healing open wounds rather than winning football matches.

De Carvalho's confrontational style has earned him a long list of deep-seated enemies, but it also re-energised a moribund institution. A contagious wave of excitement surged through the fan base, attendances at Sporting's Estadio Jose Alvalade shot up and the team became more competitive. And yet still the Primeira Liga title proved elusive.

Unity...Sousa Cintra (second from right) holds a press conference with ultra leaders

Commitment... Bruno Fernandes

Then, after five febrile years with Carvalho as the club's supremo, it all unravelled in dramatic circumstances.

The president's public criticism of players after a defeat at Atletico Madrid led to friction between Carvalho and the first-team squad, triggering a chain of events that culminated in a group of the club's own ultras storming the Alcochete training complex and assaulting members of the first team.

The fallout was devastating. Coach Jorge Jesus walked away and nine players filed legal proceedings to rescind their contracts – which, if upheld by the courts, would see some €150million worth of talent leave the club for nothing. Soon afterwards Carvalho was voted out of office at an emergency EGM by the very same fans who had given him landslide victories in the two previous elections.

A temporary management committee was hastily set up, with former president Sousa Cintra taking the reins on an interim basis until fresh elections could be held.

Cintra is famous as the man who sacked Bobby Robson on a plane home from Austria after a disappointing European result. Sporting were top of the league at the time and Robson went on to have an extremely successful spell at Porto.

To complete the feeling of a club going backwards, Cintra re-appointed former coach Jose Peseiro, who oversaw the 2004-05 campaign when Sporting were on the cusp of winning a Primeira Liga and Europa League double, only to lose it all in a disastrous final week.

Little by little, however, the chaos has given way to a semblance of normality. While three of Sporting's four members of Portugal's World Cup squad have gone – keeper Rui Patricio, midfielder William Carvalho and winger Gelson Martins – two key players were persuaded to reverse their decision and commit their future to the club.

> "I've arrived at the conclusion that this is my club. I love this club and this is where I want to be"
>
> **Sporting striker Bas Dost**

"I didn't expect to be sitting down here because bad things happened to me, but I've arrived at the conclusion that this is my club. I love this club and this is where I want to be," explained prolific Dutch striker Bas Dost, scorer of 70 goals in 90 matches for the club.

Bruno Fernandes, player of the season in Portugal last year, also "returned", rubbishing rumours he had asked for an improved contract to do so.

"When I leave Sporting I want it to be on good terms and in a deal which is good for Sporting and good for me," said the midfielder.

The number one task for the new president, who is due to be elected on September 8, will now be to unite a club that has made an art form of tearing itself apart.

Cintra has been working to that end, and in a public press conference with the leaders of Sporting's *claques* (ultra groups) he said: "My experience with the *claques* has always been positive. Freedom of expression is a wonderful thing, but it is worthless if exercised irresponsibly." In turn, the fan leaders promised full support for the team and announced that those involved in the Alcochete attack had been expelled.

While Sporting have made no big moves in the summer transfer market, neither did Porto or Benfica, so ahead of kick-off there looks to be little to choose between the squads of the "Big Three".

Tom Kundert

PSG still the team to beat

France is, of course, on a high going into the new season. Ever since *Les Bleus* delivered the country's second World Cup victory this summer, the mood has been unsurprisingly upbeat.

French actor Omar Sy described Didier Deschamps' team as "creators of happiness", president Emmanuel Macron was seen in the French dressing room "dabbing" with the players after the Final, and seemingly all of the country joined in with the song invented by the players for N'Golo Kante. Sung to the tune of the famous French number *Champs-Elysees*, the new words said something along the lines of: "He's a top man, he's very wee, but he could stop Leo Messi".

What nobody mentioned during the joyous celebrations, however, was that only one member of the starting XI in the Final actually plays in the country's domestic league.

That player did happen to be 19-year-old Kylian Mbappe, though. The Paris Saint-Germain striker scored four goals, including one in the Final, and has now become the hottest property in the world. If there were rumours circulating before that PSG might be forced to sell Mbappe to comply with UEFA Financial FairPlay rules, they have been well and truly quashed. The club has now ensured that the former Monaco man will be performing in the French capital this coming campaign by completing a permanent deal.

Lucky Thomas Tuchel to have such an incredible talent at his disposal. The 44-year-old German signed a two-year contract to replace Unai Emery as PSG coach in May and he'll be delighted to have Mbappe under his tutelage. That won't alleviate the pressure on the former Borussia Dortmund coach,

Arrival...Marseille's Duje Caleta-Car

PLAYERS TO WATCH

WILLEM GEUBBELS
(Monaco)
Born to parents with Dutch and Central African Republic roots, he was the first player born in the 21st century to appear in Ligue 1 and faces a lot of pressure after a big-money move from Lyon.

GIANLUIGI BUFFON
(Paris Saint-Germain)
The legendary Italian keeper signed a one-year deal with PSG after leaving Juventus at the end of last season. However, will he be the club's first choice ahead of Kevin Trapp and Alphonse Areola?

WAHBI KHAZRI
(Saint-Etienne)
After a successful season on loan at Rennes, the Tunisia international left Sunderland and has signed a permanent deal with Saint-Etienne. Captained his country at the World Cup, scoring twice in three games.

Permanent...Kylian Mbappe has completed his move to PSG

though. PSG won a domestic league, French Cup and League Cup treble last season, and only went out of the Champions League to eventual winners Real Madrid. Yet even that impressive record couldn't keep Emery in a job.

Tuchel knows what's at stake and has already moved to instil more discipline into the club, talking to trendy Parisian nightclub owners in a bid to stop his players partying too hard and having discussions with the patrons of preferred restaurants to make sure PSG players are only served food that corresponds with the club's dietary requirements.

He's also reshaping the squad within the club's financial constraints. Hatem Ben Arfa didn't have his contract renewed, Javier Pastore moved to Roma, Yuri Berchiche went to Athletic Bilbao, promising youngster Claudio Gomes signed for Manchester City and Thiago Motta retired to take over the club's under-19s side. The only new arrival so far has been Italy keeper Gianluigi Buffon from Juventus on a free, but PSG will clearly still be the team to beat in Ligue 1 this season – especially since Neymar has publicly confirmed his commitment to the club by stating: "I'm staying, I've got a contract with PSG."

Winning all of France's domestic trophies is pretty much a given for the club's Qatari owners. What they're really impatient for is European glory. Can Tuchel deliver it? No matter how good he is, it won't be easy.

But is there another French club out there that can offer stiff resistance to PSG in the coming league campaign?

Well, given that Monaco finished second in the table last time out and have, as usual, lost a number of their key players, you'd be hard pressed to say yes. Thomas Lemar joined Atletico Madrid, Fabinho went to Liverpool and Joao Moutinho signed for Wolves.

The club's policy seems to be to sell their best players for tidy sums, then bring in well-scouted, less high-profile players for far less money. It's served Monaco well to date and it will be interesting to see if coach Leonardo Jardim, who's been eyed up by a number of Europe's big teams, can improve the likes of midfielder Jean-Eudes Aholou (Strasbourg), striker Willem Geubbels (Lyon) and defender Ronael Pierre-Gabriel (Saint-Etienne).

Marseille made it to the Final of the Europa League last season and will be looking to mount a more serious league challenge this campaign under Rudi Garcia. Transfer business hasn't been brisk so far, with only defender Duje Caleta-Car arriving from Red Bull Salzburg. For a long time it looked like Mario Balotelli would be arriving from Nice, but the deal appears to have stalled – at least for the time being.

Nice themselves have suffered the loss of highly rated coach Lucien Favre to Dortmund, but welcome Patrick Vieira as his replacement. The former France and Arsenal midfielder will have to cope with the loss of several key players but he claims he's happy with the squad at his disposal.

One player who looks unlikely to move is Lyon playmaker and World Cup winner Nabil Fekir, whose proposed transfer to Liverpool fell through. Lyon coach Bruno Genesio has, however, lost a number of the squad that finished third in Ligue 1 last season so it might be hard for him to replicate such a feat.

After a catastrophic season where they were almost relegated, Lille have lost two big players, as midfielders Ibrahim Amadou and Yves Bissouma joined Seville and Brighton respectively. The veteran striker Loic Remy arrives from Las Palmas, alongside young PSG midfielder Jonathan Ikone.

Finally, it will be interesting to see whether Bordeaux are able to cope with the loss of their star Brazilian striker Malcom, who joined Barcelona, much to Roma's chagrin.

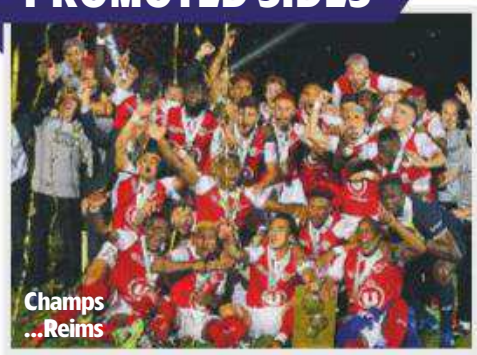
Bordeaux finished a creditable sixth last season but that might be a tough ask this time having lost their top man without bringing any new players in.

As usual, then, the silverware in France is surely PSG's to lose rather than anyone else's to win.

Howard Johnson

Prospect...Ronael Pierre-Gabriel has joined Monaco from Saint-Etienne

PROMOTED SIDES



Champs ...Reims

REIMS
The Ligue 2 champions have sold last season's top scorer Jordan Siebatcheu to Rennes, which is bound to dent their chances of survival.

NIMES
Having retained the services of Umot Bozok, who was Ligue 2's top scorer last season, they will be full of confidence that they can make a success of their forthcoming Ligue 1 campaign.

Nice take a chance on Vieira

Perhaps the only surprise about Patrick Vieira's appointment as the new boss of Nice is that the 42-year-old has opted to leave the powerful City Football Group to take up his first European role as a senior-team coach.

The former Arsenal midfielder's relationship with the Abu Dhabi-based business that owns Manchester City, New York City and Melbourne City began in 2010 when Vieira joined Man City from Internazionale. After retiring from playing in July 2011 he began his coaching career with a youth-development role at the club, before becoming reserve-team and elite-development-squad manager. He accepted his first senior coaching role in charge of New York City at the start of 2016 and consistently improved the club's fortunes during his two-and-a-half years in the United States.

When Swiss coach Lucien Favre opted to leave Nice for Borussia Dortmund at the end of last season, the Ligue 1 club were quick to make a move for Vieira, who earned 107 caps for France and won the World Cup and the European Championship. Vieira signed a three-year contract with Nice and the club's president, Jean-Pierre Rivere, is delighted to have snagged one of the brightest young managerial talents in the game.

"It's not a risk giving Patrick the job," insists Rivere. "We have a real project here and we think he's the right man to take us forward. Patrick has immense experience as a player and he's been a coach for a good few years. We hope he can transmit the winning mentality he had as a player to our squad."

Vieira arrives on the south coast of France with three members of his New York City backroom staff – assistant coaches Kristian Wilson and Christian Lattanzio, and fitness coach Matt Cook.

"I'm very happy to be coming back to France," said Vieira after signing his contract. "I am really excited and can't wait to get started. I've always followed Ligue 1 while I've been away and it's a competition that's getting more and more demanding.

"It was tough leaving New York but this was a project I just couldn't turn down. Everything's in place here for me to be able to do my job well. It's about gaining the players' trust and getting performances out on the pitch."

Vieira has made it clear that he's happy with the squad at his disposal for the forthcoming season, despite the fact that Nice lost three of their star performers in the close season. Midfielder Jean Michael Seri moved to Fulham, defender Maxime Le Marchand joined the same club and striker Alassane Plea headed to Borussia Monchengladbach.

"There won't be many more changes," says Vieira, who adds: "I'm very happy with the squad."

One of the new coach's first issues to resolve, however, is the situation regarding his former Manchester City team-mate, Italian striker Mario Balotelli, who looked to be on his way to Marseille, only for the deal to fall apart at the eleventh hour. Balotelli failed to return to training with Nice on July 2, eventually turning up two weeks late.

Vieira immediately made the forward train on his own, saying this was "normal" given that the 27-year-old wasn't "at the same physical level as his team-mates", and suggesting "the most important thing is that he makes up for lost time".

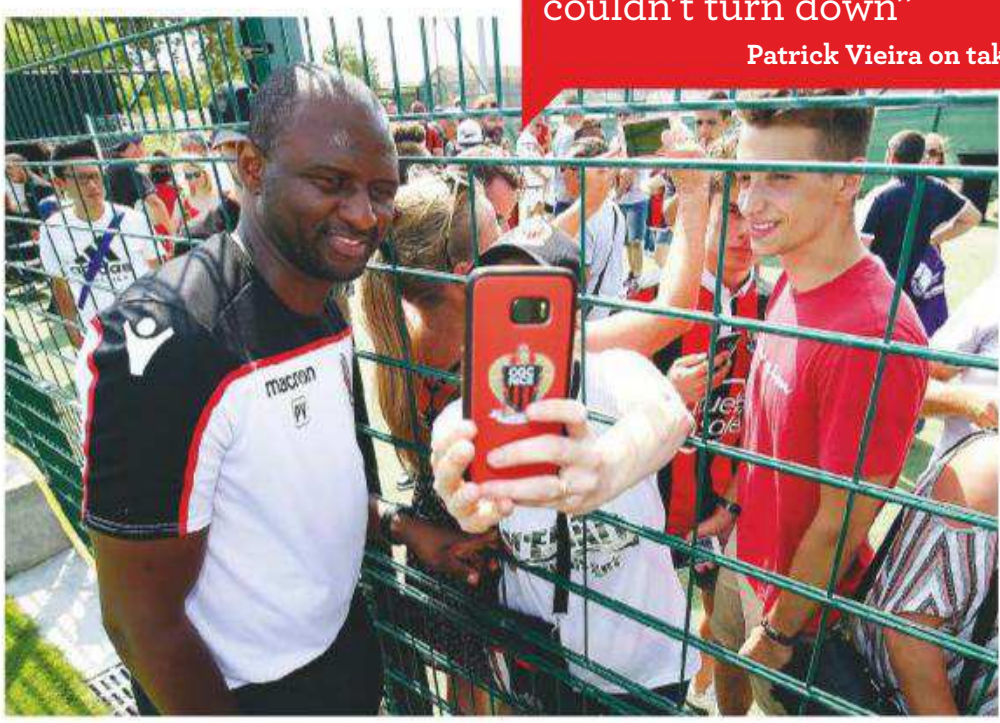
Having to deal with such a notoriously temperamental player means Vieira's first major European coaching job looks like being a testing one.

It will be interesting to see how the new man performs back in his home country in a professional capacity for the first time since he left Cannes for Milan as a player fully 23 years ago.

Howard Johnson

Project...with Nice president Jean-Pierre Rivere

> "It was tough leaving New York but this was a project I just couldn't turn down"
> **Patrick Vieira on taking charge of Nice**



In the picture... Nice's first day back at training

Searching for a World Cup dividend

Opening day...Rubin Kazan (in white) and Krasnodar

Any hopes the Russian Premier League had of securing a World Cup dividend were dashed by the sale by CSKA Moscow of midfielder Aleksandr Golovin, one of the stars of the national side's surprise run to the World Cup quarter-finals, to Monaco in a €30million deal.

The most high-profile name to move into Russia – just as everyone else was leaving after the World Cup – was German defender Benedikt Howedes, who joined champions Lokomotiv Moscow from Schalke after an injury-hit season on loan at Juventus last year. And he was joined by Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Grzegorz Krychowiak, on another season-long loan after his spell last season at West Bromwich Albion.

CSKA also bade farewell to centre-backs Sergei Igneshevich and Vasili Berezutski, who both retired, but they did pick up Iceland defender Hordur Magnusson from Bristol City.

Krasnodar were one of the busier sides in the transfer market, signing Peruvian World Cup star Christian Cueva from Sao Paulo, as well as Serbian defender Uros Spajic from Anderlecht and midfielder Dmitri Stotskiy from newly promoted Ufa.

> South Africa 2010 and Brazil 2014 offer salutary lessons that a World Cup can leave a country with plenty of white-elephant grounds

The lack of big-name arrivals in the country was accompanied by concerns over the uncertain future facing a number of the World Cup stadiums.

In the past, new World Cup arenas have provided a boost to the local domestic league, as in the case of Italy after the 1990 World Cup and post-2006 Germany. But South Africa 2010 and Brazil 2014 offer salutary lessons that a finals can leave a country with plenty of white-elephant grounds, with small crowds unable to populate the vast new complexes.

Only six of Russia's 12 World Cup venues will host Premier League football this season: Kazan, Rostov, Saint Petersburg, Moscow Spartak (now known again as Otkritie Arena), Samara and Yekaterinburg. The latter, home to Ural Yekaterinburg, is facing problems over the dismantling of the gravity-defying temporary stands that boosted crowds at the World Cup. They are supposed to be coming down but the local council has called for financial support from central government to enable that to happen.

Alexander Fetisov, deputy governor of Samara, told the *Financial Times* that central government help was still needed to fund the cost of reconstruction and running costs of Rbs500m (£6m) a year.

Elsewhere, Volgograd (Rotor), Kaliningrad (Baltika Kaliningrad) and Saransk (Mordovia Saransk) will host second-tier clubs, while Nizhny Novgorod will become the home of an eponymous third-tier club.

Down in Sochi, the coastal resort that was the scene of some of the most exciting games at the World Cup, including the 3-3 draw between Spain and Portugal, Dinamo Saint Petersburg have relocated in a highly controversial move orchestrated by Boris Rotenberg, a businessman and close ally of Vladimir Putin. Dinamo, the second team in Saint Petersburg with crowds of just a few hundred, have been renamed FC Sochi, taking the name of a club that briefly featured in the third division a few seasons ago before sinking back into the amateur ranks. Whether their future is sustainable remains to be seen.

Silverware...CSKA won the 2018 Russian Super Cup

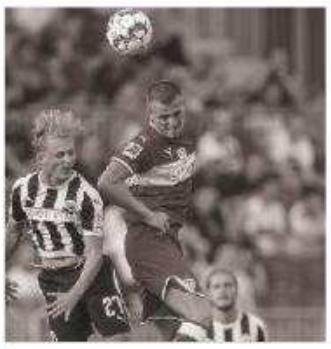
Lokomotiv will be the team to beat, with Portuguese striker Eder recruited on a permanent basis from Lille. Their closest challenger could be Zenit, who have replaced Roberto Mancini with Sergei Semak. They also welcome back Artem Dzyuba after his loan at Arsenal Tula, where he forced his way into the World Cup squad.

However, memories of that tournament are already fading fast.

John Holmesdale

Bayern aim for seven out of seven

PLAYERS TO WATCH



SANTIAGO ASCACIBAR
(Stuttgart)
Argentinian defensive midfielder whose boundless energy, strength in the tackle and good use of the ball played a key role in Stuttgart's rise up the table last term.

KOEN CASTEELS
(Wolfsburg)
Belgian keeper whose incredible reflexes were arguably the only thing that separated the VW-backed club from a relegation inferno last time out.

SERGE GNABRY
(Bayern Munich)
The former German under-21 should be an attacking godsend for the champions, at home on either flank or through the middle. On loan at Hoffenheim last term.

GENKI HARAGUCHI
(Hanover)
Right-footed left-winger who had an excellent World Cup with Japan this summer. Won the second division while on loan at Fortuna Dusseldorf last season.

NORDI MUKIELE
(RB Leipzig)
Crossed the Rhine and looks worth every cent of the €16m RB deposited in Montpellier's bank account. As outstanding in central defence as he is at right-back.

All smiles...Niko Kovac

Newly appointed Bayern Munich coach Niko Kovac could not stop smiling in pre-season. And why wouldn't he be grinning from ear to ear? The former Croatia and Eintracht Frankfurt boss now has the keys to a footballing juggernaut, a club which has comfortably claimed the last six Bundesliga titles and should, if logic is respected, make it seven.

In a championship where extreme competitive imbalance has become the norm, Bayern simply have too many weapons. Their squad is a mediocrity-free zone, stuffed to the gills with world-class talent. They have the knowhow, consistency and winning mentality. And underpinning all that they are the fourth richest club in the world, overflowing with TV, sponsorship and merchandising cash. While domestic opponents stutter and slip, Bayern just press on, rarely making bad boardroom calls and never losing their trademark on-field hunger.

> "Bayern is a place where you have to be successful. I think it's an advantage that I once played for this club and know how they think"
> **New Bayern boss Niko Kovac**

Not that the Bavarians can afford to be complacent this season. Indeed, in certain areas the alarm bells are ringing. Golden oldie wingers Franck Ribery and Arjen Robben, so crucial in the past, are now in last-curtain-call territory. They also have far too many midfielders under contract and then there may be the risk of a World Cup hangover.

Of the 11 Bayern men who took part in Russia 2018, not one performed convincingly for their respective nations, and Mats Hummels, Joshua Kimmich, Thomas Muller and Robert Lewandowski will not find it easy to promptly banish those underachieving blues. Incredibly, not one Bayern representative scored in the first phase of the tournament. Compare that big fat zero with the 18 strikes Bayern players accumulated at the same stage of Brazil 2014.

Lewandowski's state of mind will be of particular concern. Only a few months ago his agent, Pini Zahavi, was making it plain that the Pole was keen to leave. But with Bayern refusing to countenance a sale, the prolific marksman has had to row back. How will he react to the "golden handcuffs" treatment?

Another big Bayern question mark relates to Kovac himself. He has not previously worked at a high-ranking club and, as everyone is aware, he was not first choice for the job, with the Allianz-Arena hierarchy only turning to him after Jupp Heynckes refused a second year as interim boss and Thomas

Shrewd...Leverkusen buy Mitchell Weiser

ALASSANE PLEA
(Borussia Monchengladbach)
Mobile and powerful French striker signed for €23m from Nice. His arrival reflects great work by general manger Max Eberl as he had half the Premier League on his trail.

SALIF SANE
(Schalke)
The Senegalese international cost the Royal Blues just €8m from Hanover. Usually plays in central defence, but also has experience in a midfield holding role.

NICO SCHULZ
(Hoffenheim)
Widely expected to take over from Jonas Hector as the *Nationalmannschaft*'s first-choice left-back/wing-back. Extremely dynamic and has pace to burn.

KEVIN VOLLAND
(Bayer Leverkusen)
With his sharpness in the box, solid work ethic and intensity, the 25-year-old striker could be very much in contention for a recall to the national side this season.

MARIUS WOLF
(Borussia Dortmund)
Dortmund only had to pay Eintracht Frankfurt a release-clause fee of €5m for this all-action midfield all-rounder who should become a huge fan favourite.

Curtain call... Franck Ribery (left) and Arjen Robben

Tuchel opted to set up home at Paris Saint-Germain.

The architect of Eintracht's shock victory over Bayern in last season's German Cup Final, the 46-year-old Kovac is by no means a slouch. He knows his tactical and organisational onions, is smart and charismatic, clearly has a flair for producing combative teams, and as a former Bayern midfielder is familiar with the pressure-cooker atmosphere at the club. But will that be enough? The egos at Bayern take some handling and, on the face of it, Kovac and his new team look like a mismatch, with the new coach's counter-attacking strategy in marked contrast to the champions' possession-based approach.

Interesting that Kovac sees himself as latest gunslinger in Dodge/Munich. "I've just put the first notch on my pistol," he recently declared, referring to Eintracht's cup triumph, which was his first silverware as a coach. "And I hope there will be more notches to come.

"Obviously, I'm aware that Bayern is a place where you have to be successful.

"I think it's an advantage that I once played for this club and know how they think here. Growing up in Berlin I learnt how to battle and came to realise that talent alone is not enough. The players should follow that example."

> "Growing up in Berlin I learnt how to battle and came to realise that talent alone is not enough. The players should follow that example"
>
> **Niko Kovac**

Dazed and confused in the wake of the country's World Cup nightmare, fans in Germany are in need of a tonic – and nothing would work better than a genuine fight for the Bundesliga crown. Not since Borussia Dortmund won the title in 2012 has anyone come close to puncturing Bayern's bubble, and even they would probably appreciate a tougher stress test and an end to the foregone conclusions of the last six seasons – complete with an average winning margin of 16.6 points.

The likes of Dortmund, RB Leipzig, Schalke, Hoffenheim, Bayer Leverkusen and Stuttgart cannot merely cross their fingers and pray for act of god to strike Bayern down. The chasing pack have to become stronger and, whisper it gently, they do have the potential to move onwards and upwards.

Schalke and Hoffenheim – second and third last time out – have two brilliant young coaches in Domenico Tedesco and Julian Nagelsmann. A team with unmistakable momentum, Stuttgart enjoyed an exceptional run of springtime form under coach Tayfun Korkut, only losing once in 14 games. Leverkusen have recruited with shrewdness and vision, bringing in teenage Brazilian winger Paulinho from Vasco da Gama, Hertha Berlin wing-back Mitchell Weiser and Eintracht keeper Lukas Hradecky.

After only finishing fourth last season, Dortmund have been busy putting the foundations in place for double-quick renewal. New boss Lucien Favre – formerly at the helm of Hertha, Borussia Monchengladbach and Nice of France – is one of those rare breed of leaders who promotes both the solid and the swashbuckling, especially adept at setting up lightning counter-thrusts.

Dortmund personnel supremo Michael Zorc very much deserves an A grade for his efforts this summer, the fruits of his labours including a triumvirate of bright young things in French central defender Abdou Diallo from Mainz, versatile Eintracht Frankfurt midfielder Marius Wolf and Moroccan right-back Achraf Hakimi on loan from Real Madrid. Diallo, for one, certainly looks a confident type, asking: "Why can't we aim for first-place ?"

As ambitious as ever, RB Leipzig also look in good shape, with Ralf Rangnick assuming the dual-role of director of sport and "Trainer".

Due to hold the fort until the arrival in the 2019 close season of Nagelsmann, Rangnick was RB's coach when they won promotion to the top flight in 2016 and remains one of the sharpest thinkers in the German game.

Nick Bidwell

PROMOTED TEAMS

Up...Dusseldorf (in white) and Nuremberg

FORTUNA DUSSELDORF
Second-tier champions, they are back on the main stage and about to enjoy top-flight competition for the first time in 21 years. They were European Cup-winners Cup runners-up in 1979, losing 4-3 to Barcelona in a memorable Final.

NUREMBERG
The ultimate yo-yo club: too strong for the second tier, yet too fragile for the highest level. Eight promotions to the Bundesliga and as many relegations tells its own story. They were, however, national champions in 1968.

Confident.. Abdou Diallo of Borussia Dortmund

Leipzig's Rangnick prepares the path for Nagelsmann

Waiting...Julian Nagelsmann

Located on polar opposite sides of the technical area experience spectrum, two Bundesliga coaches will be subject to particular scrutiny this season.

In the blue corner, Hoffenheim's Julian Nagelsmann, the eternally boyish 31-year-old prodigy who only has a season left at the Rhein-Neckar-Arena before beginning a new mission at RB Leipzig in the summer of 2019. In the red corner, 60-year-old Ralf Rangnick, RB's locum coach, a man whose job is not only to run the first-team but also to keep all the balls in the air as director of sport.

The news that a Nagelsmann move was in the works would not have startled anyone. In just two-and-a-half years at the Hoffenheim helm he has proved the archetypal producer of miracles, pulling the club away from the relegation cliff edge in 2016 and twice masterminding top-four Bundesliga placings.

One of the brightest young tacticians in the European game and constantly linked with leading sides in both Germany and England, his departure was only a matter of time. And all the more so with a clause in his contract stating that he could leave in 2019 for a knock-down €5million.

> For the next nine months, Rangnick will be preaching back to basics

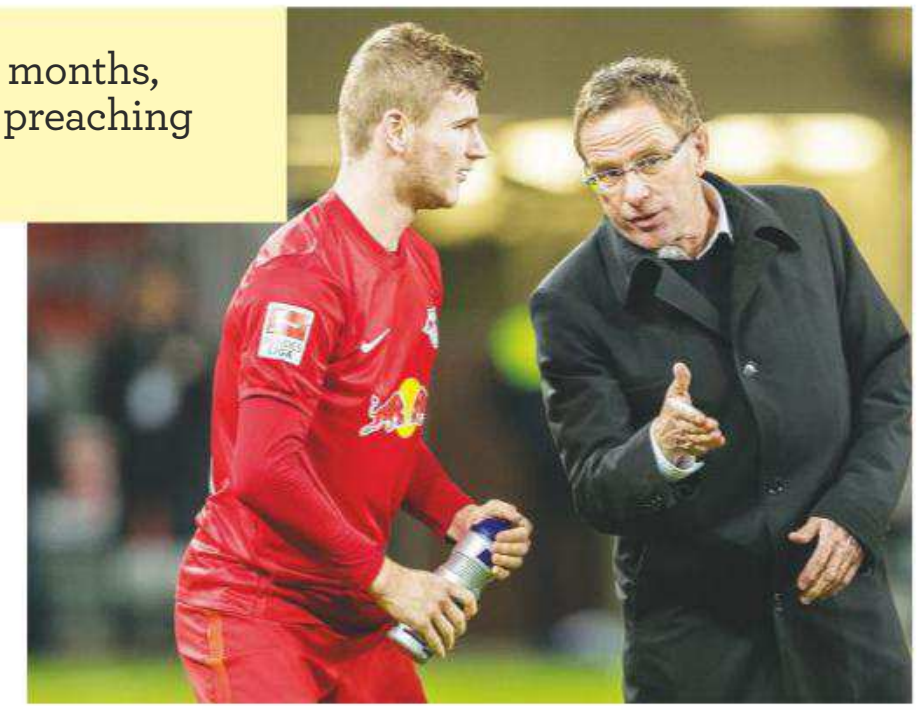
Mischievously, some pundits contend that Nagelsmann's decision to give Hoffenheim 12 months' notice has turned him into a non-authoritative lame duck. But do they really think this most driven of characters will take his foot off the gas this term?

"Nobody here needs an alibi," declared Hoffenheim's financial backer, Dietmar Hopp. "We're talking about professional football at the highest level.

"Anyone who believes that Julian will take his eye off the ball for even a second, doesn't know him well at all."

As meticulous as ever as he prepares his squad for the substantial double challenge of his club's inaugural Champions League campaign and domestic fare, Nagelsmann has no intention of resting on past laurels.

He talks of the need for a "30-40 per cent improvement in certain areas" and is prioritising a push for greater efficiency in the attacking-third, for more incisiveness when opponents put nine or 10 men behind the ball. The word from inside the camp is that much of pre-season was devoted to attacking set-pieces, the blueprint apparently provided by England's successful dead-ball strategies at Russia 2018.



Busy...Ralph Rangnick

Requiring someone to bridge the gap between the arrival of Nagelsmann and previous incumbent Ralph Hasenhuttl – who stepped aside at the end of last season – Rangnick was the obvious choice as interim.

He has an extensive track record as a Bundesliga boss with Stuttgart, Schalke, Hannover and Hoffenheim; recruited every player in the current RB squad; and enjoyed success in a previous stint in the *Roten Bullen* hot seat, being in charge when they won promotion to the Bundesliga back in 2016.

Rangnick undoubtedly has a lot work on his plate. After achieving a sensational second place in their first Bundesliga season, RB's young guns went into reverse for much of last term and were inconsistent, uninspired and only finished sixth. In Red Bull land, neither status quo or decline is acceptable. Nagelsmann or no Nagelsmann, Rangnick has to come up with immediate answers.

Never one to equivocate, Rangnick believes RB strayed too far from their DNA last season, that they neglected their erstwhile strengths: the aggressive press, instantaneous transitions, high tempo and directness. For the next nine months he will be preaching back to basics, though may also have a innovation or two up his sleeve, such as a new-look defensive three.

Rangnick's number two will be the American Jesse Marsch, who until recently was coach of New York Red Bulls. The grand plan is for Marsch to continue in the same role when Julian Nagelsmann takes over.

Nick Bidwell

PLAYERS TO WATCH

LEONARDO BONUCCI
(Juventus)
In the spotlight for a second successive summer after returning to Juventus in a deal that saw Argentinian striker Gonzalo Higuain join Milan on loan.

GONZALO HIGUAIN
(Milan)
After a disappointing World Cup he has something to prove and could do with a good season at Milan – following his swap deal with Bonucci.

SERGEJ MILINKOVIC-SAVIC
(Lazio)
Arguably one of the best attacking midfielders in Serie A last time out, he chipped in with 14 goals and will be expected to deliver more of the same this season.

ENRICO BRIGNOLA
(Benevento)
The talented striker managed to shine with relegation-bound Benevento last term. A move to another Serie A side, perhaps Sassuolo, seems certain for the under-21 international.

SIMONE VERDI
(Napoli)
Scored 10 goals for Bologna last season. Bought by Napoli for €25m, the four-times capped 26-year-old could yet become a key figure in Roberto Mancini's new Italy.

Ronaldo gives Serie A a much-needed boost

At the end of a traumatic, non World Cup summer, Italian football could not have asked for anything better. Cristiano Ronaldo, "the greatest player on the planet", joined the country's most famous club, Juventus, in what was modestly entitled "the deal of the century".

At the very moment France were wrapping up their 4-2 Final win over Croatia in Moscow, Ronaldo was flying into Turin airport. He arrived on a Sunday afternoon in order to be ready for his first full day as a Juve player the next morning, which was marked by the ritual medical and an eagerly awaited first Juventus press conference.

Speaking at the club's Allianz Stadium, the new boy said all the right things. For those who were worried that he had come to Italy just for the well-paid ride, he pointed out that he could have chosen other options, explaining that players of his age, 33, usually go to places like Qatar or China.

He also underlined the point that he had accepted the challenge of a move to the Italian champions because it would take him out of his comfort zone.

"I am going to prove that I am [still] a top player," he said. "I am going to work hard in training...I am very ambitious and I like challenges."

Asked whether he talked to his former Real Madrid boss and ex-Juve player Zinedine Zidane before agreeing to the move, he answered: "No, I didn't speak to him. There was no need for anyone to tell me just how good a team Juventus is. Everyone knows that.

"In the last four years they have twice played in the Champions League Final, while in the last seven years they have won seven league titles.

"This is one of the strongest teams in the world."

Of course, all Juve supporters wanted to know if their standing ovation after his overhead-kick goal in the Champions League quarter-finals in Turin last spring influenced his decision.

Again, his answer was well calibrated, replying: "I don't remember exactly how I felt, but I was very happy.

"Not just because we had won that night, nor because I had scored a great goal, but a detail that really made the difference was the reaction of the Juventus fans, the way they applauded me, that was a huge surprise. I did not expect that.

"I have always liked Juventus, but after that moment I certainly liked the club even more."

If there is any precedent to the arrival of Ronaldo in Italian football it would be the signing of Diego Maradona by Napoli in 1984. The ever-passionate Napoli fans desperately wanted the Argentinian superstar to revive the club's fortunes so they might just win a first-ever Serie A title. And he did just that, winning not one but two league titles with Napoli.

Now, the similarly enthusiastic welcome afforded by Juve followers to Ronaldo would suggest that they too have a pressing wish-list. Namely, to win the Champions League.

"I don't see the Champions League as an obsession," said the Portuguese. "Things need to happen naturally. A football team has a lot of players and victory in a cup competition depends on a whole host of factors. It is what the president [Andrea Agnelli] said to me: 'It's not an obsession, it's a dream.'

"I hope to help Juventus win a Champions League trophy in the next four years. I know that will be very difficult, but I think it is possible"

So what prompted this largely unexpected move? In reality, there are a number of factors.

Firstly, as alluded to by the player himself, rather than go play heavily

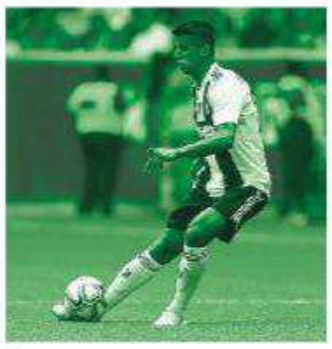
Stunning...Ronaldo's goal against Juventus

> "There was no need for anyone to tell me just how good a team Juventus is...this is one of the strongest teams in the world"
>
> **Cristiano Ronaldo on his new club**

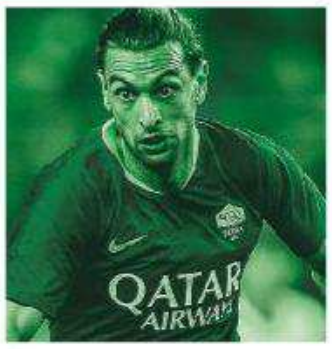
PATRICK CUTRONE
(Milan)
Scored more than team-mates Andre Silva and Nikola Kalinic combined last season and looks destined for a bright future, not only with Milan but also Italy.

NICOLO BARELLA
(Cagliari)
The under-21 international was the brightest light in a side that came close to relegation last season. Already called up to the senior Italy squad, he is a very useful midfielder.

DANIELE BASELLI
(Torino)
Attacking midfielder who was one of the new names chosen by Roberto Mancini for a series of friendlies in May, coming on in the 1-1 draw with Holland for his first cap.



JOAO CANCELO
(Juventus)
Although the attention will be on his illustrious compatriot and team-mate Cristiano Ronaldo, the right-back could prove to be an excellent buy at €40m from Valencia.



JAVIER PASTORE
(Roma)
Having left Palermo in 2011, the Argentinian returns to Italian football after seven years with Paris Saint-Germain to link up with Edin Dzeko and Cengiz Under.

Training...with his new team-mates

remunerated, but less-challenging football in China, USA or Qatar, he has opted for one of the few non-Spanish and non-English clubs that can offer him a realistic crack at the Champions League. Put simply, at Juventus he is still in the game and at the very highest level.

Having already won titles with Real Madrid and Manchester United, it is hard to believe that someone with his fierce pride, determination and ambition was not tempted by the idea of adding a Serie A title, or even better a Champions League medal, to his personal trophy haul.

Some have speculated that the move could help his complex tax situation. In July, a Spanish news agency confirmed Ronaldo had "resolved" his outstanding tax debts to the Spanish state, by making a payment of €18.8m. Could it be that he will now move his fiscal residence to Italy, in the hope of arriving at a more favourable agreement with the Italian Inland Revenue?

While that consideration may or may not be true, romantics still cling to the hope that the standing ovation at the Allianz Stadium last April counts for something, too. Certainly, Juve's sporting director, Fabio Paratici, made much of the matter on "CR7 Day", telling Sky Italia: "This mad idea began after that game in Turin... after his overhead kick goal. In the week after that, his agent, Jorge Mendes, told us that Ronaldo had been 'really struck' by the overall reaction, so much so that one day he would like to play for Juventus."

Juve president Agnelli told Paratici to pursue the idea and in a relatively short time the "deal of the century" was up and running.

While many have suggested that this was an important fillip for Italian football, Roma captain Daniele De Rossi was perhaps more accurate when he said: "The arrival of Cristiano Ronaldo is a huge boost for Italian football but, above all, it is a huge boost for Juventus, the club that has bought him."

And not just on the pitch. The arrival of Ronaldo prompted an immediate hike in the club's share price with the club's market valuation rising from €665m to €815m in a matter of days.

What seems certain is that Juventus will have thought long and hard about the soundness of a business plan which, reportedly, involves a total cost of more than €300m, when taxes, wages and the like are included.

If Juventus feel that Ronaldo is worth this level of outlay it can only be presumed that they have got their sums right. Time will tell, but the initial rush on CR7 shirts suggests that this move could yet notch Juventus one more rung up the international ladder of fame and influence, certainly in marketing, merchandising and publicity terms.

Remember, too, that this is the club which in the last decade has emerged from the Calciopoli scandal and a year in Serie B to reach unparalleled domestic dominance, pulling off some very handy transfer deals – such as the free-transfer signings of Andrea Pirlo, Sami Khedira and Paul Pogba, who was subsequently sold back to Manchester United for €105m.

> "The arrival of Cristiano Ronaldo is a huge boost for Italian football but, above all, it is a huge boost for Juventus"
>
> **Roma captain Daniele De Rossi**

Despite their success, Juventus are still ranked only 10th in Deloitte's Money League, with the first three in the ranking – Manchester United, Real Madrid and Barcelona – all earning 50 per cent more in annual revenues. According to *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, international auditors KMPG have estimated that Juventus could increase their annual turnover by €100m in the next two or three years in the wake of the Ronaldo deal.

All of that will become much cleared in due course. What is clear is already that Ronaldo arrival has been warmly welcomed by Italian football.

Current national coach Roberto Mancini probably spoke for many when he said: "This is excellent news.

"You can only learn from great players like him and our young players, the ones who have already been called up to the Italy team, will only get better if they have the chance of playing against him.

"All in all, a player like him is a blessing for Serie A."

Paddy Agnew

PROMOTED TEAMS

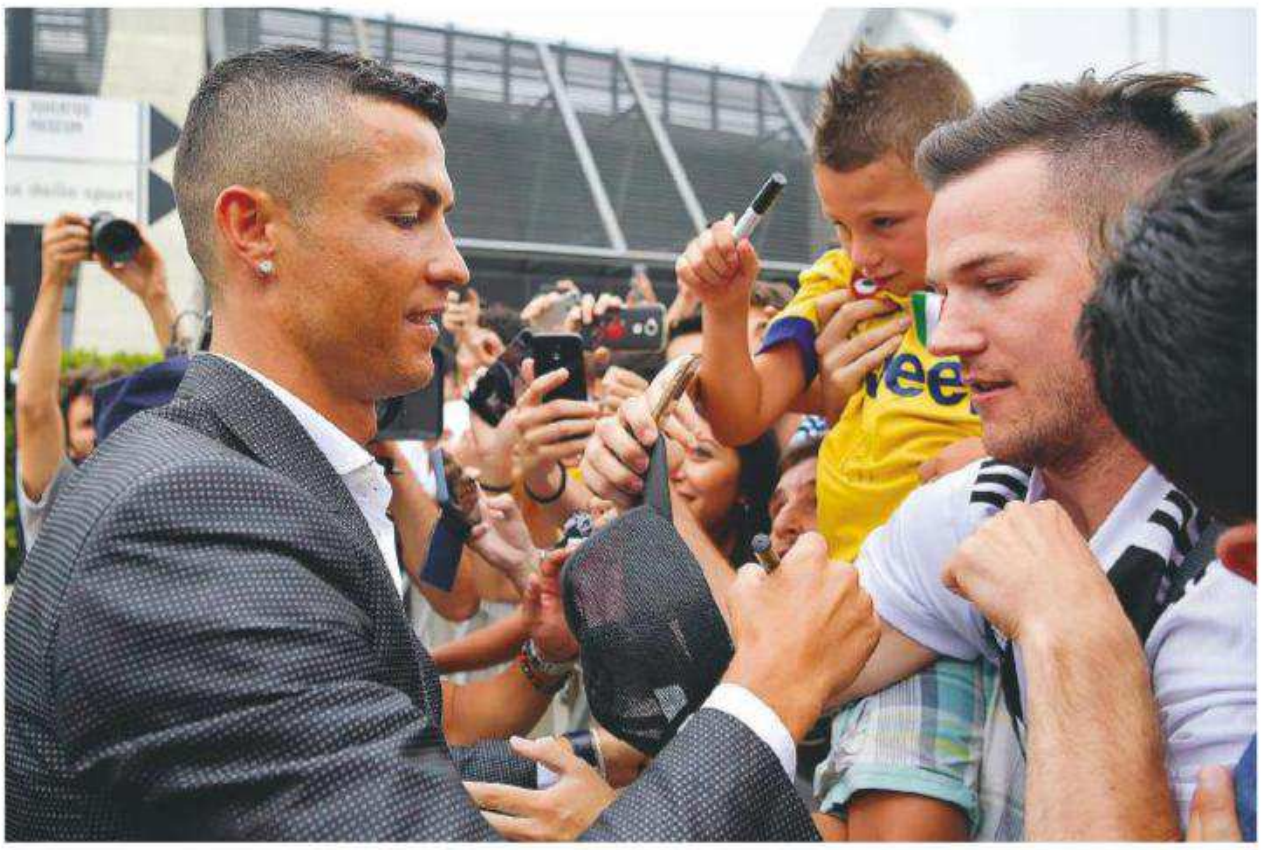
Deduction...Parma

EMPOLI
The runaway winners of last season's Serie B are back for a 12th season in the top flight. As always, staying up will be a major achievement given their modest resources.

PARMA
Were it not for their involvement in an alleged match-fixing scandal on the last day of the season, Parma's return to Serie A after liquidation and three straight promotions would be a perfect fairytale. As it is, they are set to start the season on minus five points. Staying up will clearly be a very tough ask.

FROSINONE
Promoted to Serie A for the second time in their history, following a first campaign in 2015-2016, they are likely candidates for an immediate return to Serie B. With a squad of experienced journeymen they are, however, unlikely to sell their hides cheaply.

In demand...signing autographs for fans



Gerrard facing uphill task at Ibrox

One slip on the Anfield pitch by Steven Gerrard in 2014 denied Liverpool their long-cherished English title. But that costly mistake had a much heavier price for Brendan Rodgers.

Gerrard's error against Chelsea ultimately cost Rodgers his job as manager. Now the pair are re-united in Glasgow, on opposite sides of the fence in a very different sort of turf war.

From the moment Rangers recruited the 38-year-old Gerrard as their new boss to try to halt Celtic's pursuit of an eighth successive Premiership title, Rodgers and his old Liverpool captain became adversaries, not colleagues.

On one side is the man who has won every domestic trophy since coming to Celtic in 2016, with back-to-back trebles. On the other, is a rookie whose only previous experience was in charge of Liverpool's youth team.

"It was a no-brainer for me," insists Gerrard. "I knew the size of the club. I've watched them from far and been lucky to be here for games with Celtic.

"This opportunity does not come around very often, clubs of this stature. I have confidence in myself."

What Rangers do not have, is cash. Gerrard's predecessor, Pedro Caixinha, squandered £10million last summer on signings who failed to deliver. Portugal defender Bruno Alves left for Parma after only one season at Ibrox and Fabio Cardoso, who cost £1.5m from Vitoria Setubal, had his deal terminated with two years left.

> "This opportunity does not come around very often...I have confidence in myself"
> **Steven Gerrard**

With Rangers' South Africa-based owner Dave King's funds under scrutiny, it is no surprise that spending is limited. Rangers made a £200,000 bid for Kyle Lafferty which was condemned by his employers, Hearts, as paltry.

Gerrard has used his Anfield connections to sign winger Ryan Kent on loan from Liverpool, while three defenders were also added: Connor Goldson (Brighton) and Nikola Katic (Slaven Belupo), full-back Jon Flanagan (Liverpool). Midfielders Ovie Ajaria (Liverpool) and Lassana Coulibaly (Angers), plus Nigerian striker Umar Sadiq (Roma), came in on loan, and experience was found in the shape of midfielder Scott Arfield (Burnley) and goalkeeper Allan McGregor (Hull City).

Debut...Rangers' new boss

In contrast, Celtic have pushed the boat out. The £9m paid to Paris Saint Germain for Odsonne Edouard made the striker Celtic's most expensive signing of all time, eclipsing the £6m joint-record fee, which has stood for almost two decades and was paid for both Chris Sutton (Chelsea, 2000) and John Hartson (Coventry City 2001).

Record fee...Celtic's Odsonne Edouard

The potential shown by 20-year-old Edouard – who netted a winner at Ibrox and two in another win over Rangers while on loan last term – convinced Rodgers to push for the Frenchman to be given a four-year deal alongside compatriots Moussa Dembele and Olivier Ntcham.

The hunger for an eighth title in a row is evident. "The Premiership is our bread and butter," says Rodgers. "Your first aim is to win your league and that allows you to savour everything else after that."

Yet again, Celtic's biggest challenge could come from Aberdeen. The north-east club have finished second in the last four seasons and manager Derek McInnes turned down the Rangers' job in November.

McInnes has signed midfielder Lewis Ferguson from Hamilton and the teenager's Europa League goal at Burnley showed his potential.

Pittodrie witnessed its biggest average attendance since 1984-85, when Alex Ferguson made Aberdeen champions, and is on course to repeat those numbers this term, while four-placed Hibernian had their best crowds since the 1950s – when Hibs were serial title winners – to see Neil Lennon's stylish football. Across Edinburgh, Hearts have made 13 signings to reshape the Tynecastle squad.

Newly promoted St Mirren lost their manager, Jack Ross, to Sunderland, and replaced him with Alan Stubbs, who won the Scottish Cup with Hibernian in 2016.

Phil Gordon

Madrid turn to Lopetegui

There was an hour's difference between the time when Julen Lopetegui was supposed to be talking to the media and the time he actually did. One hour...and some 3,569 kilometres.

On a hot evening in Sochi, Spain's coach held a press conference before the national team's opening game at the 2018 World Cup. Lopetegui, though, was not there. He had flown out the afternoon before, sent home in silence, with Fernando Hierro reluctantly stepping into his place at the last minute.

So, while Hierro spoke in Russia, Lopetegui was back in Spain holding a different press conference.

Announced as Real Madrid's new boss on July 12, sacked as Spain coach on July 13, Lopetegui was presented at the Santiago Bernabeu on July 14. Without him, Spain didn't last long in Russia. Defeated on penalties by the hosts in their first knockout game, it was over too soon. "They took our leader away," said Koke as he left the Luzhniki Stadium.

"They" were Real Madrid. Or the Spanish Football Federation, depending on your point of view.

There were tears when Lopetegui spoke in Madrid. "Yesterday was the saddest day of my life," he said, his voice breaking. "Today is the happiest."

It will be difficult to disassociate the two days. In all probability, being Madrid coach will always be tinged with regret for Lopetegui as the opportunity came at an exceptionally high cost: the chance to take Spain into the World Cup. He probably felt he would not get another opportunity to coach Madrid – but he will never get the chance to take his homeland to the World Cup again.

> "They took away our leader"
> **Spain midfielder Koke**

The president of Spain's football federation, Luis Rubiales – who was voted in just weeks before Lopetegui's exit – said he had not been informed of negotiations between the national coach and Madrid, and that when he was told an announcement was imminent he was denied time to manage the situation.

Rubiales flew from Moscow to Krasnodar that night and sacked the coach the following morning. He said it was an ethical question and that he had little choice. Spain went into the World Cup without Lopetegui; Real Madrid went into a new era sooner than they had expected.

In truth, Madrid had not expected to have to do so at all. It had all started with Zinedine Zidane's shock decision to leave just five days after winning the Champions League Final – a decision which kicked off a summer where, at least to start with, it seemed like ▸

Gone...Cristiano Ronaldo and Zinedine Zidane

In charge...president Florentino Perez (right) presents Real Madrid's new coach

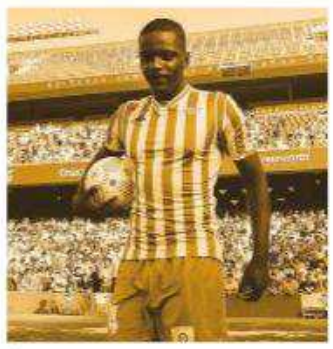
PLAYERS TO WATCH

THOMAS LEMAR
(Atletico Madrid)
La Liga's most expensive signing of the summer so far, at €70m. The deal was agreed in June, before Antoine Griezmann committed himself to Atletico for another season.

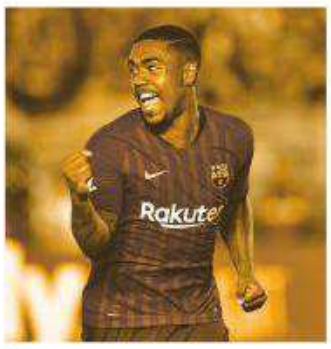
CLEMENT LENGLET
(Barcelona)
French centre-back who has been signed as defensive cover for the Spanish champions following an outstanding 18 months at Sevilla.

VINICIUS JUNIOR
(Real Madrid)
A €45m deal for the teenager was agreed with Flamengo last year. He was presented at the Bernabeu in July but may have to bide his time in Real's reserve side, Castilla.

KARL-TOKO EKAMBI
(Villarreal)
The Cameroon striker boosts Villarreal's attacking options after Cedric Bakambu's move to China. Enjoyed an excellent campaign in France for Angers last year.



WILLIAM CARVALHO
(Real Betis)
The big central midfielder makes a long-awaited move away from troubled Sporting, moving to Seville in preference to a number of other suitors, including Monaco.



MALCOM
(Barcelona)
The Brazilian wideman was snatched at the vary last minute from under the noses of Roma, who thought they had agreed a deal with Bordeaux.

ARTHUR
(Barcelona)
The diminutive Brazilian midfielder completed his long-planned move from Gremio amid inevitable comparisons with Barca's departing Andres Iniesta.

GELSON MARTINS
(Atletico Madrid)
Another player signed on a free after he rescinded his contract with Sporting – although the Portuguese club are demanding €40m in compensation.

SOFIANE BOUFAL
(Celta Vigo)
By being out of favour at Southampton the winger missed out on Morocco's World Cup squad but he now hopes to get his career back on track on loan in Spain.

ALVARO ODRIOZOLA
(Real Madrid)
The 22-year-old was signed from Real Socieded in a €30m deal and is expected to provide long-term competition for the club's first-choice right-back, Dani Carvajal.

everything was happening at Madrid. It was like it was all stuck on fast forward, all the drama and chaos condensed.

"It might look like a strange moment, but it is the right moment," Zidane said. He also said it was in everyone's interests. But, sitting alongside him, Madrid's president Florentino Perez wore a face that said differently. In his statement, Perez said differently too, explaining that Madrid were keen to ensure everyone knew that this was the Frenchman's choice, not theirs.

Coaches don't usually get the chance to leave Real Madrid when they want to and Zidane was the first one not to be sacked since Jose Antonio Camacho, 15 years ago.

Although Zidane left with three European Cups, Madrid finished 17 points behind Barcelona in La Liga and the impression was that following him would be an impossible task. Many coaches certainly didn't want to, including Max Allegri and Joachim Low.

Madrid also lost Cristiano Ronaldo who, after 10 years and 451 goals, joined Juventus. He had threatened to go immediately after the Champions League Final – and indeed many times before that – but few thought it would actually happen. He referred to his time at Madrid in the past tense, even before captain Sergio Ramos had been to collect the trophy. And he had reiterated his position afterwards, saying: "I will speak in the coming days." But he didn't. And then he was gone. It turned out that he had been telling the truth in Kiev.

New roles...Karim Benzema (left) and Gareth Bale

That same night, Gareth Bale, the most expensive player in Madrid's history, had threatened to go as well. He had come on to score two goals in the Final, including that brilliant bicycle kick. But he said afterwards that he was not happy with how little he had played.

The departures of Zidane and Ronaldo changed Bale's situation, improving it, but this was still another issue for Madrid to deal with.

And yet, if it started like that, it soon slowed down. It all happened early on, and then, pretty quickly, it felt like nothing much was happening. The revolution didn't come. The assumption that Ronaldo leaving would see Madrid steaming back into the market to swiftly reasserting their status was not entirely fulfilled – not least because it is not so easy to do so.

These are different days to what they were and power has shifted. Signing stars is not so simple.

Neymar announced that he was staying at Paris Saint-Germain. Kylian Mbappe did the same. Chelsea set the price for Eden Hazard prohibitively high. Robert Lewandowski looked rather less attractive than he once had. Meanwhile, discussions with Bale reassured him he would play a more central role – both figuratively and literally.

And so Madrid continued a recent policy of signing the next generation of players: future *galacticos* rather than current ones. It is a policy, Perez admitted, that has been partly forced upon them by a shift in the market. Madrid no longer dominate an arena populated by PSG and Premier League clubs. There is a also preference to concentrate resources into Neymar, even if that means having to wait.

> Madrid continued a policy of signing future *galacticos* rather than current ones

So Lopetegui has to work with what he has. This means a new role for Bale – and a new role for Karim Benzema too, perhaps more of a goalscorer than before, less of a facilitator for Ronaldo.

In addition there are the arrivals of Vinicius Junior, Alvaro Odriozola and Rodrygo. There's also Isco, supported by Marco Asensio. And Luka Modric, Toni Kroos, Raphael Varane, Marcelo and Ramos are all still around.

So it's no bad team, that's for sure – even if Ronaldo has gone, and Zidane too. But it's not the same. And it's not what they hoped and expected.

Lopetegui is there now and it is he who must build something good. It was not his intention, but the cost of joining Madrid was huge. He, more than anyone else, desperately hopes it was worth it.

Sid Lowe

Let down... Luis Rubiales

PROMOTED TEAMS

Return...Valladolid

RAYO VALLECANO
Back in the top flight after two seasons away, it's a welcome return for a club famed for its noisy and colourful ultras. Their promotion takes the number of teams in the Madrid area to five.

HUESCA
Promoted to the top flight for the first time in their 58-year history after losing out in the play-offs a year earlier, their Alcoraz stadium in the north-east of the country holds only 5,500 and they only reached the second tier in 2008. They are coached by former Atletico Madrid goalkeeper Leo Franco.

VALLADOLID
Back in La Liga after a four-year absence. They are coached by former Espanyol and Deportivo La Coruna midfielder Sergio Gonzalez who, after being appointed in April, led them on a late run that took them to the play-offs, where they beat Gijon and Numancia.

Basle's fall from grace

Ahead...Fernando Varela of PAOK puts pressure on Basle

What has happened to the usually sure-footed Basle, the biggest and most prestigious club in Switzerland? Once omnipotent in their own land, winning eight consecutive championships between 2010 and 2017, they now lie bloodied and bruised, a team to be pitied rather than feared.

Their long run of domestic dominance was brought to an end last spring by a renascent Young Boys, but they were widely expected to spring into fightback mode this term.

Instead, they have completely lost their way, sacking coach Raphael Wicky just two games into the new season and tamely failing to make the Champions League cut, beaten 5-1 on aggregate by PAOK in the second qualifying round.

> "We wanted to start the new season with Wicky. In hindsight, that was the wrong decision"
> **Basle director of sport Marco Streller**

Wicky, in charge for just 12 months, effectively paid the price for a string of poor results in the summer, with a 5-0 pre-season humbling at the hands of Dutch side Feyenoord, a 2-1 loss at home to St Gallen on the first weekend of the Swiss Super League and the same score in the first leg at PAOK in Greece.

"We no longer had a good feeling [about Wicky]," explains Basle director of sport Marco Streller. "We didn't want to be accused of waiting too long to take action. We had to assume responsibility. We were concerned by developments, and when there's not 100 per cent trust you have to react.

"Naturally, the significance of warm-up games should not be overrated.

"However we lost our last five games.

"The 5-0 against Feyenoord proved that something wasn't right. We wanted to start the new season with Wicky.

"In hindsight, that was the wrong decision."

Streller claims Wicky probably would have been fired much earlier if FCB had not performed so well in the Champions League last season, beating Benfica and Manchester United on their way to the round of 16, adding: "Without such an unbelievable European campaign we might have opted for a different course in the early part of the new year."

Worrying for Basle fans, even with Wicky gone – temporarily replaced by the club's youth-team leader, Alex Frei – there was no immediate improvement when hosting PAOK in the return. Trailing 1-0 after just seven minutes, and three goals in arrears at the final whistle, FCB were as abject as before. No leaders, no teamwork and no physical staying power.

Humbled...Serey Die (right) and Basle lost 5-0 to Feyenoord

As the critics never tire of pointing out, the current Basle squad is patently not strong enough. In the last two transfer windows far too many key players have headed for the exit and they are badly missing the likes of central defender Manuel Akanji (Borussia Dortmund), left-winger Mohamed Elyounoussi (Southampton), keeper Tomas Vaclik (Sevilla) and full-back Michael Lang (Borussia Monchengladbach).

In a sure sign of a crumbling dynasty, many of Streller's recruitment hunches have simply not paid off, notably the deals to bring back old FCB midfield favourites Valentin Stocker and Fabian Frei from the Bundesliga.

To clear up the mess, Basle have summoned former Grasshoppers, Cologne, Bochum and Austria boss Marcel Koller. Arriving to sign his two-year contract in his agent's shiny black Bentley, Koller must somehow transform a beat-up jalopy into a top-of-the-range model. That might be asking a lot. But at least he should make Basle roadworthy.

"When the heroes always win in a movie, it's boring," is a quote attributed to Basle president Bernhard Burgener, who made his money as a film producer.

A penny for Burgener's thoughts now?

Nick Bidwell

Glenn Moore

United think big

Stoney's side gearing up for new season

The big reveal was done, as is usual these days, on social media. A glossy video, shot on the industrial streets of Manchester and Salford, with backdrops of graffiti-pocked walls and glitzy office blocks, stated "the new devils are in town". Four months after announcing they would be forming a professional women's team, Manchester United had a squad ready to roll.

The presentation was confirmation that, having belatedly decided to enter the women's game, United, like their neighbours Manchester City, would be throwing serious resources at it. This will come as a relief to the Football Association, whose latest reorganisation of the league system was in part aimed at bringing the English's game biggest brand name into the fold.

United's squad is a strong one, with a greater accent on youth than anticipated.

Although they will start in the second tier, and the 2019 Women's World Cup is on the horizon, United have signed two current England internationals in keeper Siobhan Chamberlain and, as captain, defender Alex Greenwood. They are two of five recruits from top-flight side Liverpool, with another England cap, Amy Turner, whose international career has stalled through injury, among them.

Prior to the arrival of the Glazers, United had an amateur women's team and they have maintained a youth programme, with seven graduates from that scheme returning to the club, including Katie Zelem who won Serie A with Juventus last season. The squad has an average age of 21 and is entirely English except for three Scots, headed by Lizzie Arnott who signed off from Hibernian by scoring five goals in their 9-0 Scottish Cup Final rout of Celtic.

Casey Stoney is the first head coach. She won 130 England caps and is widely respected, but her only senior coaching experience has been as assistant to Phil Neville in his year as England manager. Recognising this, she will be assisted by Willie Kirk, who managed WSL1 club Bristol City last season.

"Manchester United are the biggest club in the world," says Stoney. "The fact they are having a women's team and I am going to be able to introduce it from scratch, to build a team, to build a philosophy, for me there is no more exciting opportunity.

"I truly believe Manchester United has the ability to change the face of women's football forever."

Stoney will be expected to secure promotion at the first attempt, not least as there has been no relegation from WSL 1 and Doncaster Rovers Belles, last season's winners of WSL2, as the second tier was known, have dropped into the regionalised Women's National League.

One of the most iconic British women's sides, from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s Doncaster Belles was the most recognisable name in English women's football, due to their success and media coverage, which included a BBC TV documentary. However, the club were then eclipsed by the better-resourced Arsenal.

> "I truly believe Manchester United has the ability to change the face of women's football forever"
> Casey Stoney

Despite a period when they linked with Doncaster Rovers men's team – thus the incorporation of Rovers in their name – Belles have struggled to meet the rising costs involved with professionalisation and have accepted they cannot afford the financial commitment required in the Championship.

Along with Sheffield, they are quitting the semi-professional game, having initially accepted a place in the new tier two FA Women's Championship.

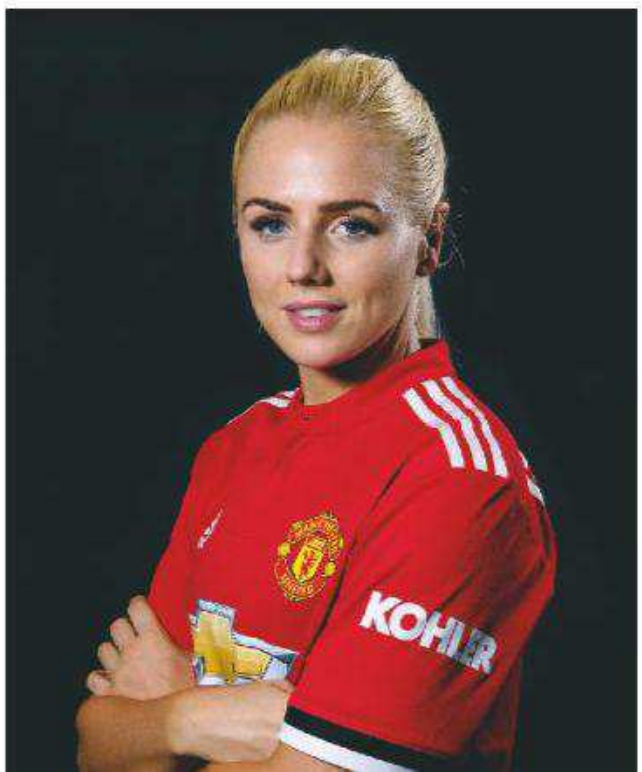
This left the FA with an 11-team Super League and a 10-team Championship, although Crystal Palace's elevation to the latter means an unwieldy 11 teams in both the Super League and Championship.

Manchester United were not the only team busy recruiting players and coaches. West Ham United, promoted from third tier to first, signed England internationals Claire Rafferty and Gilly Flaherty from Chelsea, Scotland's Jane Ross and Holland's Tessel Middag from Manchester City. They will be coached by Matt Beard, who led Liverpool to back-to-back titles in 2013 and 2014 and was coach at Boston Breakers in the US when they folded.

Of the established Super League teams, Liverpool have had the greatest turnover, also losing Gemma Bonner and Caroline Weir to Manchester City and Sophie Ingle to Chelsea. New coach Neil Redfearn, who managed Leeds United and Rotherham United in the men's game before moving into the women's and taking Doncaster to the WSL2 title, went back to Belles to sign their captain Leandra Little and former England defender Sophie Bradley-Auckland, raided neighbours Everton for ex-Belles striker Courtney Sweetman-Kirk and acquired experienced defender Niamh Fahey, who was recently at Bordeaux.

Besides Rafferty, Flaherty, Katie Chapman (retired) and

Respected...Man United coach Casey Stoney



Skipper...Alex Greenwood

Newcomer...Jane Ross has joined West Ham United

winger Gemma Davison (Reading), Chelsea lost Eni Aluko to Juventus, where she will be joined by fellow 2015 World Cup bronze medallist Lianne Sanderson. Jess Carter, lured from Birmingham, and New Zealander Ali Riley are the pick of the replacements, though the stiffest competition will be between the posts with Lizzie Durack joining from Everton to challenge Hedvig Lindahl and Carly Telford.

Among other notable moves, Arsenal have signed German international Tabea Kemme form Potsdam, Birmingham profited from Sunderland's demise with the arrival of their captain Lucy Staniforth, and Manchester City sold Izzy Christiansen to Lyon while signing Lauren Hemp, the PFA Young Player of the Year, from Bristol City.

Durack and Hemp may find they have gone from first-team regulars to benchwarmers, such is the depth of competition at their new clubs, but that depth also means they will be tested more in training than in most WSL matches, making them better players.

Standards are rising but some long-established clubs are struggling to keep up as a well-funded elite pull away.

The question is, how long will it take Manchester United to join them? WS

Round-up

Newcomers...Roma take on Juventus

NEW SERIE A CLUBS

Milan and Roma have followed Fiorentina and Juventus in establishing a women's section.

Milan took over the licence of runners-up Brescia but were not allowed to take up their Champions League place, which went to Fiorentina.

Roma, who include legendary former US international Mia Hamm on their board, took over the amateur club of the same name who previously did not have a formal link with the men's team.

Carolina Morace, former Canada coach, will coach Milan, while Elisabetta Bavagnoli, her former Italian team-mate and assistant in Canada, will coach Roma.

Keen... fans in Iran

FEMALE FANS BREAK NEW GROUND IN IRAN

There has been a small step forward in Iran, who along with Saudi Arabia were the only men's World Cup 2018 finalists not to have a women's international team.

For the first time in 38 years – since the revolution that overthrew the Shah – women were allowed into the national stadium in order to watch Iran play Spain in the men's World Cup on big screens.

PSG boss ...Olivier Echouafni

ECHOUAFNI BACK IN CHARGE

Olivier Echouafni, fired as coach of France's women's team after their unsuccessful Euro 2017, was appointed coach of Paris Saint-Germain. He will be assisted by former France and PSG defender Bernard Mendy.

CHAMPIONS LOSE MAROZSAN

Lyon playmaker Dzsenifer Marozsan suffered a pulmonary embolism, which will probably rule her out of the start of the season. The Champions League holders have signed Izzy Christiansen (Manchester City) and Carolin Simon (Freiburg) but lost Camille Abily (retired), Morgan Brian (Chicago Red Stars), Claire Lavogez (Fleury) and Kheira Hamraoui (Barcelona).

Ruled out... Dzsenifer Marozsan

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AUGUST 11
Bournemouth v Cardiff
Fulham v Crystal Palace
Huddersfield v Chelsea
Newcastle v Tottenham
Watford v Brighton
Wolves v Everton

AUGUST 12
Arsenal v Manchester City
Liverpool v West Ham
Southampton v Burnley

AUGUST 18
Burnley v Watford
Cardiff v Newcastle
Chelsea v Arsenal
Everton v Southampton
Leicester v Wolves
Tottenham v Fulham
West Ham v Bournemouth

AUGUST 19
Brighton v Manchester United
Manchester City v Huddersfield

AUGUST 20
Crystal Palace v Liverpool

AUGUST 25
Arsenal v West Ham
Bournemouth v Everton
Fulham v Burnley
Huddersfield v Cardiff
Liverpool v Brighton
Southampton v Leicester
Wolves v Manchester City

AUGUST 26
Newcastle v Chelsea
Watford v Crystal Palace

AUGUST 27
Manchester United v Tottenham

SEPTEMBER 1
Brighton v Fulham
Burnley v Manchester United
Chelsea v Bournemouth
Crystal Palace v Southampton
Everton v Huddersfield
Leicester v Liverpool
Manchester City v Newcastle
West Ham v Wolves

SEPTEMBER 2
Cardiff v Arsenal
Watford v Tottenham

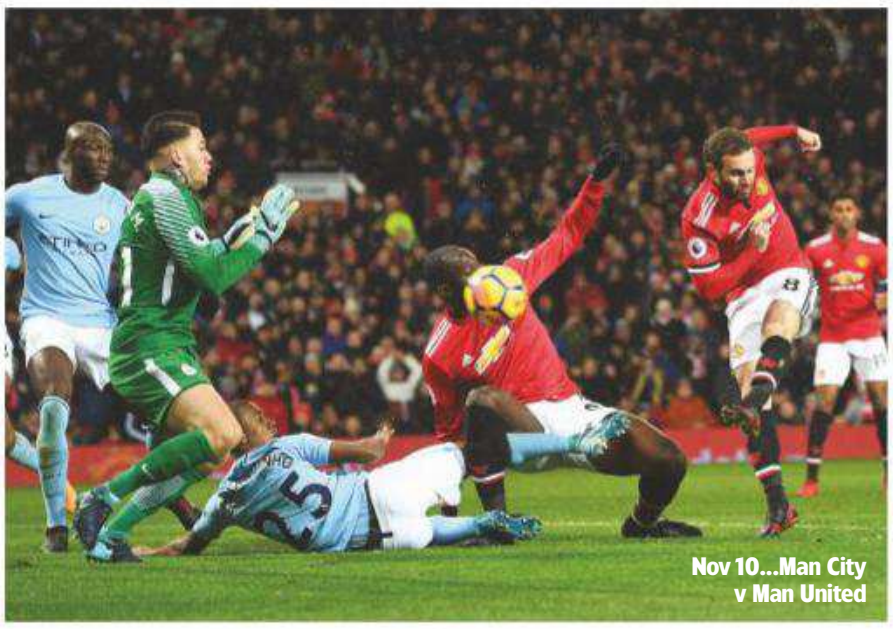
SEPTEMBER 15
Bournemouth v Leicester
Chelsea v Cardiff
Huddersfield v Crystal Palace
Manchester City v Fulham
Newcastle v Arsenal
Tottenham v Liverpool
Watford v Manchester United

SEPTEMBER 16
Everton v West Ham
Wolves v Burnley

SEPTEMBER 17
Southampton v Brighton

SEPTEMBER 22
Brighton v Tottenham
Burnley v Bournemouth
Cardiff v Manchester City
Crystal Palace v Newcastle
Fulham v Watford
Leicester v Huddersfield
Liverpool v Southampton
Manchester United v Wolves

SEPTEMBER 23
Arsenal v Everton


Nov 10...Man City v Man United

West Ham v Chelsea

SEPTEMBER 29
Arsenal v Watford
Chelsea v Liverpool
Everton v Fulham
Huddersfield v Tottenham
Manchester City v Brighton
Newcastle v Leicester
West Ham v Manchester United
Wolves v Southampton

SEPTEMBER 30
Cardiff v Burnley

OCTOBER 1
Bournemouth v Crystal Palace

OCTOBER 6
Brighton v West Ham
Burnley v Huddersfield
Crystal Palace v Wolves
Fulham v Arsenal
Leicester v Everton
Liverpool v Manchester City
Manchester United v Newcastle
Southampton v Chelsea
Tottenham v Cardiff
Watford v Bournemouth

OCTOBER 20
Arsenal v Leicester
Bournemouth v Southampton
Cardiff v Fulham
Chelsea v Manchester United
Everton v Crystal Palace
Huddersfield v Liverpool
Manchester City v Burnley
Newcastle v Brighton
West Ham v Tottenham
Wolves v Watford

OCTOBER 27
Brighton v Wolves
Burnley v Chelsea
Crystal Palace v Arsenal
Fulham v Bournemouth
Leicester v West Ham
Liverpool v Cardiff
Manchester United v Everton
Southampton v Newcastle
Tottenham v Manchester City
Watford v Huddersfield

NOVEMBER 3
Arsenal v Liverpool
Bournemouth v Manchester United
Cardiff v Leicester
Chelsea v Crystal Palace
Everton v Brighton
Huddersfield v Fulham
Manchester City v Southampton
Newcastle v Watford
West Ham v Burnley
Wolves v Tottenham

NOVEMBER 10
Arsenal v Wolves
Cardiff v Brighton
Chelsea v Everton
Crystal Palace v Tottenham
Huddersfield v West Ham
Leicester v Burnley
Liverpool v Fulham
Manchester City v Manchester United
Newcastle v Bournemouth
Southampton v Watford

NOVEMBER 24
Bournemouth v Arsenal
Brighton v Leicester
Burnley v Newcastle
Everton v Cardiff
Fulham v Southampton
Manchester United v Crystal Palace
Tottenham v Chelsea
Watford v Liverpool
West Ham v Manchester City
Wolves v Huddersfield

DECEMBER 1
Arsenal v Tottenham
Cardiff v Wolves
Chelsea v Fulham
Crystal Palace v Burnley
Huddersfield v Brighton
Leicester v Watford
Liverpool v Everton
Manchester City v Bournemouth
Newcastle v West Ham
Southampton v Manchester United

DECEMBER 4
Bournemouth v Huddersfield
Brighton v Crystal Palace
Burnley v Liverpool
Fulham v Leicester
Watford v Manchester City
West Ham v Cardiff
Wolves v Chelsea
Manchester United v Arsenal

DECEMBER 5
Everton v Newcastle
Tottenham v Southampton

DECEMBER 8
Arsenal v Huddersfield
Bournemouth v Liverpool
Burnley v Brighton
Cardiff v Southampton
Chelsea v Manchester City
Everton v Watford
Leicester v Tottenham
Manchester United v Fulham
Newcastle v Wolves
West Ham v Crystal Palace

DECEMBER 15
Brighton v Chelsea
Crystal Palace v Leicester
Fulham v West Ham
Huddersfield v Newcastle
Liverpool v Manchester United
Manchester City v Everton
Southampton v Arsenal
Tottenham v Burnley
Watford v Cardiff
Wolves v Bournemouth

DECEMBER 22
Arsenal v Burnley
Bournemouth v Brighton
Cardiff v Manchester United
Chelsea v Leicester
Everton v Tottenham
Huddersfield v Southampton
Manchester City v Crystal Palace
Newcastle v Fulham
West Ham v Watford
Wolves v Liverpool

Feb 27... Newcastle v Burnley

DECEMBER 26

Brighton v Arsenal
Burnley v Everton
Crystal Palace v Cardiff
Fulham v Wolves
Leicester v Manchester City
Liverpool v Newcastle
Manchester United v Huddersfield
Southampton v West Ham
Tottenham v Bournemouth
Watford v Chelsea

DECEMBER 29

Brighton v Everton
Burnley v West Ham
Crystal Palace v Chelsea
Fulham v Huddersfield
Leicester v Cardiff
Liverpool v Arsenal
Manchester United v Bournemouth
Southampton v Manchester City
Tottenham v Wolves
Watford v Newcastle

JANUARY 1

Arsenal v Fulham
Bournemouth v Watford
Cardiff v Tottenham
Chelsea v Southampton
Everton v Leicester
Huddersfield v Burnley
Manchester City v Liverpool
Newcastle v Manchester United
West Ham v Brighton
Wolves v Crystal Palace

JANUARY 12

Brighton v Liverpool
Burnley v Fulham
Cardiff v Huddersfield
Chelsea v Newcastle
Crystal Palace v Watford
Everton v Bournemouth
Leicester v Southampton
Manchester City v Wolves
Tottenham v Manchester United
West Ham v Arsenal

JANUARY 19

Arsenal v Chelsea
Bournemouth v West Ham
Fulham v Tottenham

Huddersfield v Manchester City
Liverpool v Crystal Palace
Manchester United v Brighton
Newcastle v Cardiff
Southampton v Everton
Watford v Burnley
Wolves v Leicester

JANUARY 29

Arsenal v Cardiff
Bournemouth v Chelsea
Fulham v Brighton
Huddersfield v Everton
Wolves v West Ham
Manchester United v Burnley

JANUARY 30

Newcastle v Manchester City
Southampton v Crystal Palace
Liverpool v Leicester
Tottenham v Watford

FEBRUARY 2

Brighton v Watford
Burnley v Southampton
Cardiff v Bournemouth
Chelsea v Huddersfield
Crystal Palace v Fulham
Everton v Wolves
Leicester v Manchester United
Manchester City v Arsenal
Tottenham v Newcastle
West Ham v Liverpool

FEBRUARY 9

Brighton v Burnley
Crystal Palace v West Ham
Fulham v Manchester United
Huddersfield v Arsenal
Liverpool v Bournemouth
Manchester City v Chelsea
Southampton v Cardiff
Tottenham v Leicester
Watford v Everton
Wolves v Newcastle

FEBRUARY 23

Arsenal v Southampton
Bournemouth v Wolves
Burnley v Tottenham
Cardiff v Watford
Chelsea v Brighton
Everton v Manchester City
Leicester v Crystal Palace
Manchester United v Liverpool
Newcastle v Huddersfield
West Ham v Fulham

FEBRUARY 26

Arsenal v Bournemouth
Cardiff v Everton
Huddersfield v Wolves
Leicester v Brighton
Crystal Palace v Manchester United

FEBRUARY 27

Chelsea v Tottenham
Newcastle v Burnley
Southampton v Fulham
Liverpool v Watford
Manchester City v West Ham

MARCH 2

Bournemouth v Manchester City
Brighton v Huddersfield
Burnley v Crystal Palace
Everton v Liverpool
Fulham v Chelsea
Manchester United v Southampton
Tottenham v Arsenal
Watford v Leicester
West Ham v Newcastle
Wolves v Cardiff

MARCH 9

Arsenal v Manchester United
Cardiff v West Ham
Chelsea v Wolves
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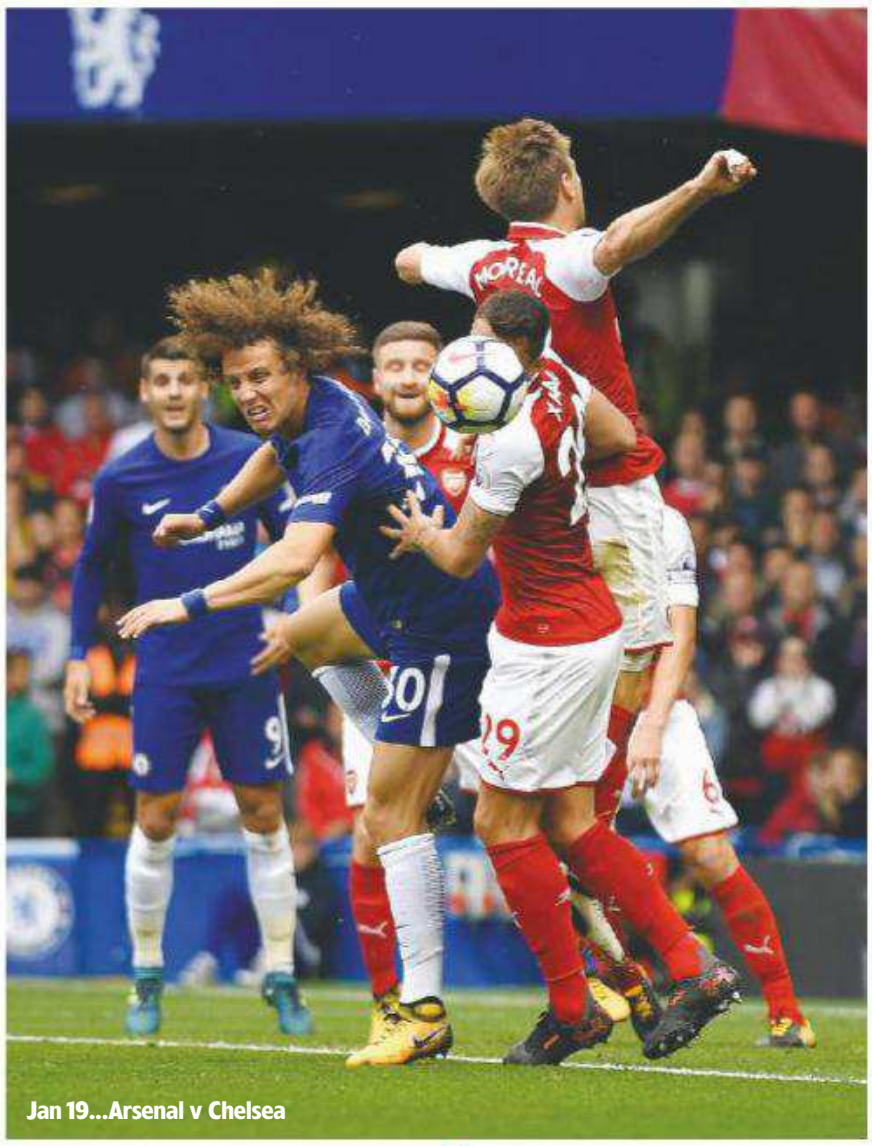
Huddersfield v Bournemouth
Leicester v Fulham
Liverpool v Burnley



Jan 19...Arsenal v Chelsea

Manchester City v Watford
Newcastle v Everton
Southampton v Tottenham

MARCH 16

Bournemouth v Newcastle
Brighton v Cardiff
Burnley v Leicester
Everton v Chelsea
Fulham v Liverpool
Manchester United v Manchester City
Tottenham v Crystal Palace
Watford v Southampton
West Ham v Huddersfield
Wolves v Arsenal

MARCH 30

Arsenal v Newcastle
Brighton v Southampton
Burnley v Wolves
Cardiff v Chelsea
Crystal Palace v Huddersfield
Fulham v Manchester City
Leicester v Bournemouth
Liverpool v Tottenham
Manchester United v Watford
West Ham v Everton

APRIL 6

Bournemouth v Burnley
Chelsea v West Ham
Everton v Arsenal
Huddersfield v Leicester
Manchester City v Cardiff
Newcastle v Crystal Palace
Southampton v Liverpool
Tottenham v Brighton
Watford v Fulham
Wolves v Manchester United

APRIL 13

Brighton v Bournemouth
Burnley v Cardiff
Crystal Palace v Manchester City
Fulham v Everton
Leicester v Newcastle
Liverpool v Chelsea
Manchester United v West Ham
Southampton v Wolves
Tottenham v Huddersfield
Watford v Arsenal

APRIL 20

Arsenal v Crystal Palace
Bournemouth v Fulham
Cardiff v Liverpool
Chelsea v Burnley
Everton v Manchester United
Huddersfield v Watford
Manchester City v Tottenham
Newcastle v Southampton
West Ham v Leicester
Wolves v Brighton

APRIL 27

Brighton v Newcastle
Burnley v Manchester City
Crystal Palace v Everton
Fulham v Cardiff
Leicester v Arsenal
Liverpool v Huddersfield
Manchester United v Chelsea
Southampton v Bournemouth
Tottenham v West Ham
Watford v Wolves

MAY 4

Arsenal v Brighton
Bournemouth v Tottenham
Cardiff v Crystal Palace
Chelsea v Watford
Everton v Burnley
Huddersfield v Manchester United
Manchester City v Leicester
Newcastle v Liverpool
West Ham v Southampton
Wolves v Fulham

MAY 12

Brighton v Manchester City
Burnley v Arsenal
Crystal Palace v Bournemouth
Fulham v Newcastle
Leicester v Chelsea
Liverpool v Wolves
Manchester United v Cardiff
Southampton v Huddersfield
Tottenham v Everton
Watford v West Ham

FRANCE: LIGUE 1

AUGUST 10
Marseille v Toulouse

AUGUST 11
Nantes v Monaco
Angers v Nimes
Lille v Rennes
Montpellier v Dijon
Nice v Reims
Saint-Etienne v Guingamp

AUGUST 12
Lyon v Amiens
Bordeaux v Strasbourg
Paris SG v Caen

AUGUST 17
Reims v Lyon

AUGUST 18
Guingamp v Paris SG
Amiens v Montpellier
Caen v Nice
Dijon v Nantes
Monaco v Lille
Rennes v Angers

AUGUST 19
Strasbourg v Saint-Etienne
Toulouse v Bordeaux
Nimes v Marseille

AUGUST 25
Amiens v Reims
Bordeaux v Monaco
Lille v Guingamp
Lyon v Strasbourg
Marseille v Rennes
Montpellier v Saint-Etienne
Nantes v Caen
Nice v Dijon
Paris SG v Angers
Toulouse v Nimes

SEPTEMBER 1
Angers v Lille
Dijon v Caen
Guingamp v Toulouse
Lyon v Nice
Nimes v Paris SG
Reims v Montpellier
Rennes v Bordeaux
Saint-Etienne v Amiens
Strasbourg v Nantes

SEPTEMBER 2
Monaco v Marseille

SEPTEMBER 15
Amiens v Lille
Bordeaux v Nimes
Caen v Lyon
Dijon v Angers
Marseille v Guingamp
Montpellier v Strasbourg
Nantes v Reims
Nice v Rennes
Paris SG v Saint-Etienne
Toulouse v Monaco

SEPTEMBER 22
Angers v Toulouse
Guingamp v Bordeaux
Lille v Nantes
Monaco v Nimes
Montpellier v Nice
Reims v Dijon
Rennes v Paris SG
Saint-Etienne v Caen
Strasbourg v Amiens

SEPTEMBER 23
Lyon v Marseille

SEPTEMBER 26
Amiens v Rennes
Bordeaux v Lille
Caen v Montpellier
Dijon v Lyon
Marseille v Strasbourg
Monaco v Angers
Nantes v Nice
Nimes v Guingamp
Paris SG v Reims
Toulouse v Saint-Etienne

SEPTEMBER 29
Angers v Guingamp
Caen v Amiens
Lille v Marseille
Lyon v Nantes
Montpellier v Nimes
Nice v Paris SG
Reims v Bordeaux
Rennes v Toulouse
Saint-Etienne v Monaco
Strasbourg v Dijon

OCTOBER 6
Amiens v Dijon
Angers v Strasbourg
Bordeaux v Nantes
Guingamp v Montpellier
Lille v Saint-Etienne
Marseille v Caen
Monaco v Rennes
Nimes v Reims
Toulouse v Nice

OCTOBER 7
Paris SG v Lyon

OCTOBER 20
Caen v Guingamp
Dijon v Lille
Lyon v Nimes
Montpellier v Bordeaux
Nantes v Toulouse
Nice v Marseille
Paris SG v Amiens
Reims v Angers
Saint-Etienne v Rennes
Strasbourg v Monaco

OCTOBER 27
Amiens v Nantes
Angers v Lyon
Bordeaux v Nice
Guingamp v Strasbourg
Lille v Caen
Monaco v Dijon
Nimes v Saint-Etienne
Rennes v Reims
Toulouse v Montpellier

OCTOBER 28
Marseille v Paris SG

NOVEMBER 3
Caen v Rennes
Dijon v Nimes
Lyon v Bordeaux
Montpellier v Marseille
Nantes v Guingamp
Nice v Amiens
Paris SG v Lille
Reims v Monaco
Saint-Etienne v Angers
Strasbourg v Toulouse

NOVEMBER 10
Angers v Montpellier
Bordeaux v Caen
Guingamp v Lyon
Lille v Strasbourg
Marseille v Dijon
Nimes v Nice
Rennes v Nantes
Saint-Etienne v Reims
Toulouse v Amiens

NOVEMBER 11
Monaco v Paris SG

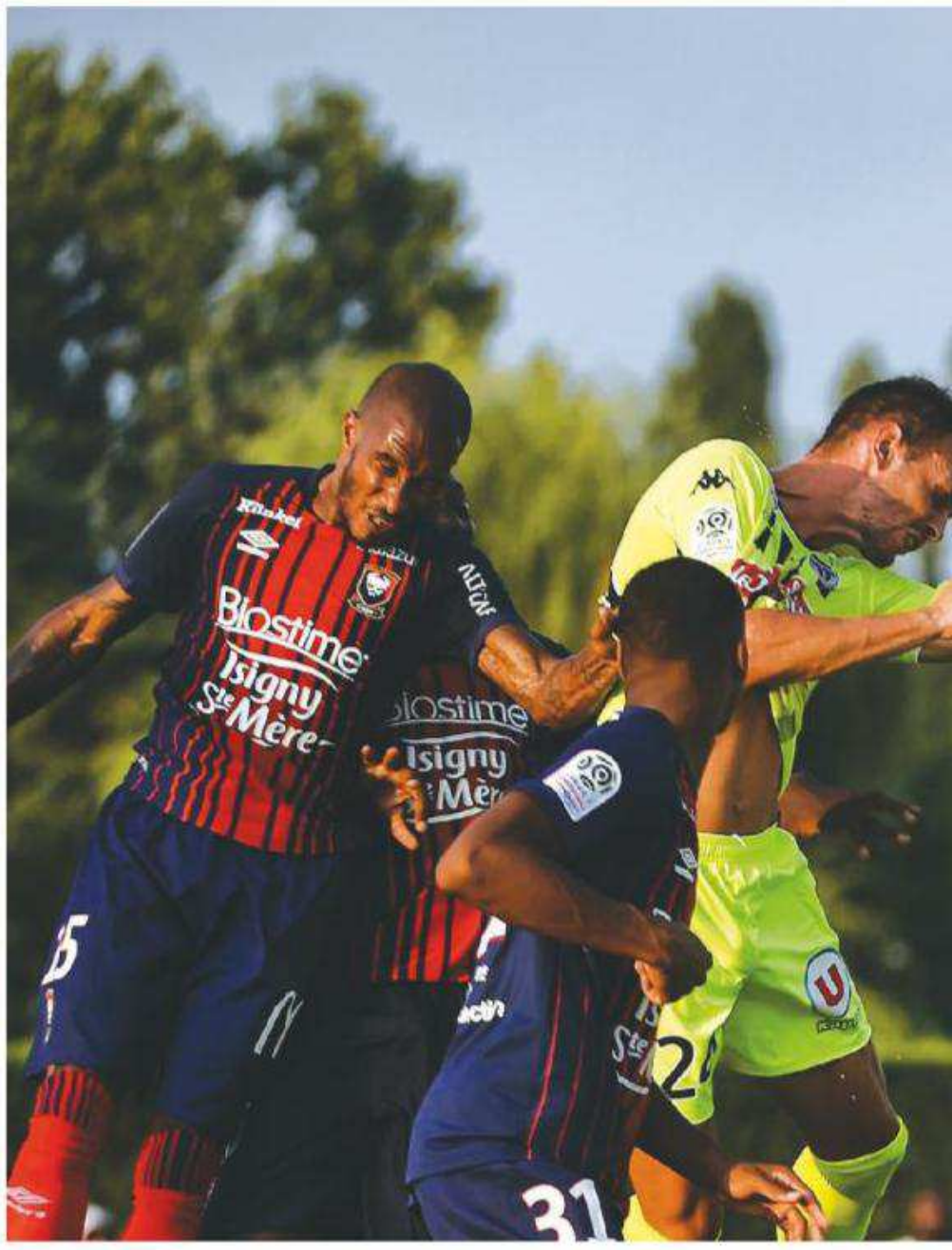
NOVEMBER 24
Amiens v Marseille
Caen v Monaco
Dijon v Bordeaux
Lyon v Saint-Etienne
Montpellier v Rennes
Nantes v Angers
Nice v Lille
Paris SG v Toulouse
Reims v Guingamp
Strasbourg v Nimes

DECEMBER 1
Angers v Caen
Bordeaux v Paris SG
Guingamp v Nice
Lille v Lyon
Marseille v Reims
Monaco v Montpellier
Nimes v Amiens
Rennes v Strasbourg
Saint-Etienne v Nantes
Toulouse v Dijon

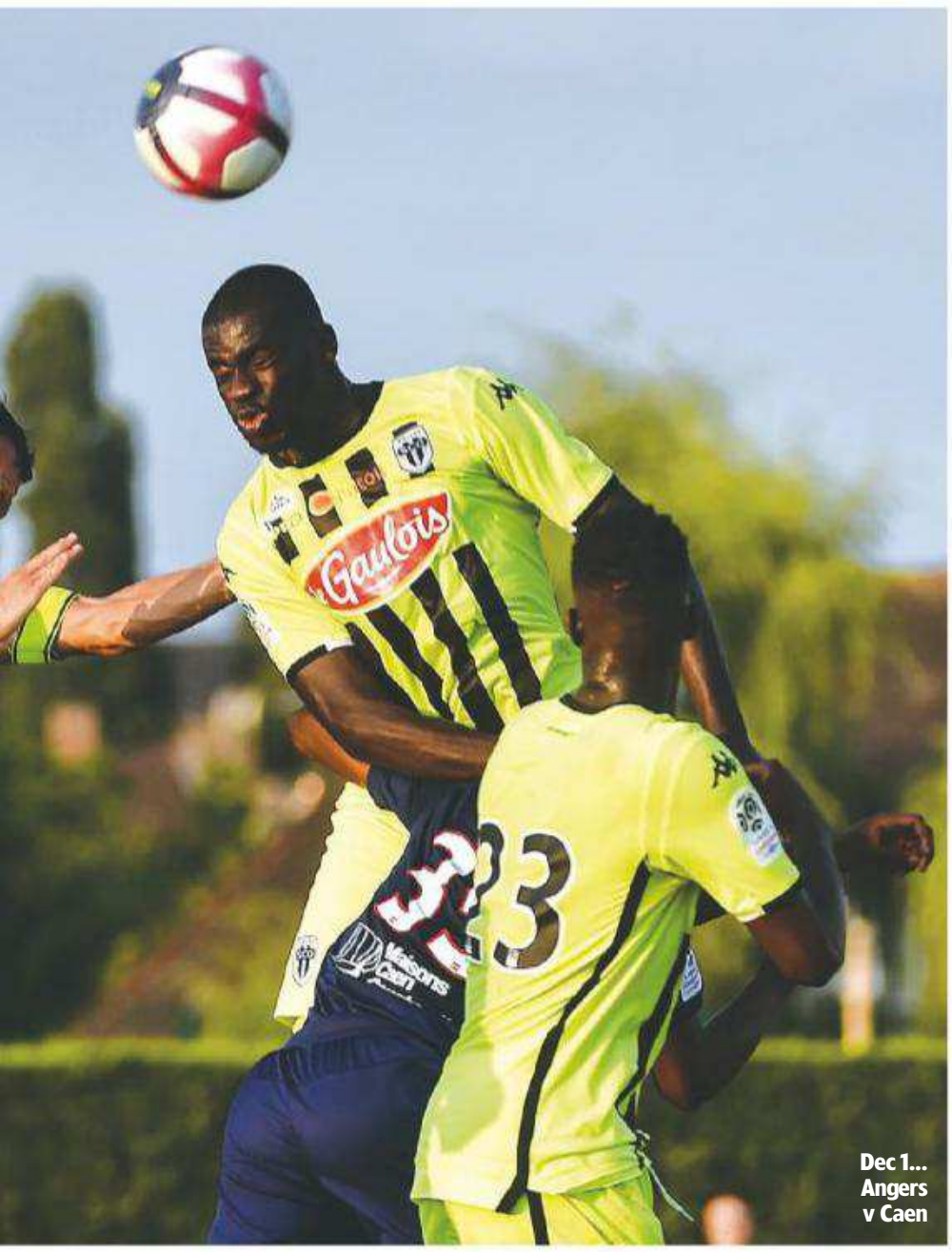
DECEMBER 5
Amiens v Monaco
Bordeaux v Saint-Etienne
Caen v Nimes
Dijon v Guingamp
Lyon v Rennes
Montpellier v Lille
Nantes v Marseille
Nice v Angers
Reims v Toulouse
Strasbourg v Paris SG

DECEMBER 8
Angers v Bordeaux
Guingamp v Amiens
Lille v Reims
Monaco v Nice
Nimes v Nantes
Paris SG v Montpellier
Rennes v Dijon
Saint-Etienne v Marseille
Strasbourg v Caen
Toulouse v Lyon

DECEMBER 15
Amiens v Angers
Caen v Toulouse
Dijon v Paris SG



Nov 24...Lyon v Saint-Etienne


Dec 1... Angers v Caen

Guingamp v Rennes
Lyon v Monaco
Marseille v Bordeaux
Nantes v Montpellier
Nice v Saint-Etienne
Nimes v Lille
Reims v Strasbourg

DECEMBER 22

Angers v Marseille
Bordeaux v Amiens
Lille v Toulouse
Monaco v Guingamp
Montpellier v Lyon
Paris SG v Nantes
Reims v Caen
Rennes v Nimes
Saint-Etienne v Dijon
Strasbourg v Nice

JANUARY 12

Amiens v Paris SG
Caen v Lille
Dijon v Montpellier
Guingamp v Saint-Etienne
Lyon v Reims
Nantes v Rennes
Nice v Bordeaux
Nimes v Angers
Toulouse v Strasbourg

JANUARY 13

Marseille v Monaco

JANUARY 19

Angers v Nantes
Bordeaux v Dijon
Caen v Marseille
Lille v Amiens
Monaco v Strasbourg
Nimes v Toulouse
Paris SG v Guingamp
Reims v Nice
Rennes v Montpellier

JANUARY 20

Saint-Etienne v Lyon

JANUARY 26

Amiens v Lyon
Dijon v Monaco
Guingamp v Reims
Marseille v Lille
Montpellier v Caen
Nantes v Saint-Etienne
Nice v Nimes
Paris SG v Rennes
Strasbourg v Bordeaux
Toulouse v Angers

FEBRUARY 2

Angers v Dijon
Bordeaux v Guingamp
Caen v Nantes
Lille v Nice
Monaco v Toulouse
Nimes v Montpellier
Reims v Marseille
Rennes v Amiens
Saint-Etienne v Strasbourg

FEBRUARY 3

Lyon v Paris SG

FEBRUARY 9

Amiens v Caen
Dijon v Marseille
Guingamp v Lille
Montpellier v Monaco
Nantes v Nimes
Nice v Lyon
Paris SG v Bordeaux
Rennes v Saint-Etienne
Strasbourg v Angers
Toulouse v Reims

FEBRUARY 16

Angers v Nice
Bordeaux v Toulouse

Jan 13...Marseille v Monaco

Caen v Strasbourg
Lille v Montpellier
Lyon v Guingamp
Marseille v Amiens
Monaco v Nantes
Nimes v Dijon
Reims v Rennes
Saint-Etienne v Paris SG

FEBRUARY 23

Amiens v Nice
Dijon v Saint-Etienne
Guingamp v Angers
Montpellier v Reims
Nantes v Bordeaux
Paris SG v Nimes
Rennes v Marseille
Strasbourg v Lille
Toulouse v Caen

FEBRUARY 24

Monaco v Lyon

MARCH 2

Angers v Monaco
Bordeaux v Montpellier
Caen v Paris SG
Guingamp v Nantes
Lille v Dijon
Lyon v Toulouse
Marseille v Saint-Etienne
Nice v Strasbourg
Nimes v Rennes
Reims v Amiens

MARCH 9

Amiens v Nimes
Dijon v Reims
Marseille v Nice
Monaco v Bordeaux
Montpellier v Angers
Nantes v Paris SG
Rennes v Caen
Saint-Etienne v Lille
Strasbourg v Lyon
Toulouse v Guingamp

MARCH 16

Angers v Amiens
Bordeaux v Rennes
Caen v Saint-Etienne
Guingamp v Dijon
Lille v Monaco
Lyon v Montpellier
Nice v Toulouse
Nimes v Strasbourg
Reims v Nantes

MARCH 17

Paris SG v Marseille

MARCH 31

Amiens v Bordeaux
Dijon v Nice
Marseille v Angers
Monaco v Caen
Montpellier v Guingamp
Nantes v Lille
Rennes v Lyon
Saint-Etienne v Nimes
Strasbourg v Reims
Toulouse v Paris SG

APRIL 6

Amiens v Saint-Etienne
Angers v Rennes
Bordeaux v Marseille
Guingamp v Monaco
Lyon v Dijon
Nice v Montpellier
Nimes v Caen
Paris SG v Strasbourg
Reims v Lille
Toulouse v Nantes

APRIL 13

Caen v Angers
Dijon v Amiens
Lille v Paris SG
Marseille v Nimes
Monaco v Reims
Montpellier v Toulouse
Nantes v Lyon
Rennes v Nice
Saint-Etienne v Bordeaux
Strasbourg v Guingamp

APRIL 20

Dijon v Rennes
Guingamp v Marseille
Lyon v Angers
Nantes v Amiens
Nice v Caen
Nimes v Bordeaux
Reims v Saint-Etienne
Strasbourg v Montpellier
Toulouse v Lille

APRIL 21

Paris SG v Monaco

APRIL 28

Amiens v Strasbourg
Angers v Reims
Bordeaux v Lyon
Caen v Dijon
Lille v Nimes
Marseille v Nantes
Montpellier v Paris SG
Nice v Guingamp
Rennes v Monaco
Saint-Etienne v Toulouse

MAY 4

Bordeaux v Angers
Guingamp v Caen
Lyon v Lille
Monaco v Saint-Etienne
Montpellier v Amiens
Nantes v Dijon
Paris SG v Nice
Reims v Nimes
Strasbourg v Marseille
Toulouse v Rennes

MAY 11

Amiens v Toulouse
Angers v Paris SG
Caen v Reims
Dijon v Strasbourg
Lille v Bordeaux
Nice v Nantes
Nimes v Monaco
Rennes v Guingamp
Saint-Etienne v Montpellier

MAY 12

Marseille v Lyon

MAY 18

Bordeaux v Reims
Guingamp v Nimes
Lille v Angers
Lyon v Caen
Monaco v Amiens
Montpellier v Nantes
Paris SG v Dijon
Saint-Etienne v Nice
Strasbourg v Rennes
Toulouse v Marseille

MAY 25

Amiens v Guingamp
Angers v Saint-Etienne
Caen v Bordeaux
Dijon v Toulouse
Marseille v Montpellier
Nantes v Strasbourg
Nice v Monaco
Nimes v Lyon
Reims v Paris SG
Rennes v Lille

GERMANY: BUNDESLIGA

AUGUST 24
Bayern Munich v Hoffenheim

AUGUST 25
B Monchengladbach v Bayer Leverkusen
Dusseldorf v Augsburg
Freiburg v Eintracht Frankfurt
Hertha Berlin v Nuremberg
Werder Bremen v Hanover
Wolfsburg v Schalke

AUGUST 26
Dortmund v RB Leipzig
Mainz v Stuttgart

AUGUST 31
Hanover v Dortmund

SEPTEMBER 1
Augsburg v B Monchengladbach
Bayer Leverkusen v Wolfsburg
Eintracht Frankfurt v Werder Bremen
Hoffenheim v Freiburg
Nuremberg v Mainz
Stuttgart v Bayern Munich

SEPTEMBER 2
RB Leipzig v Dusseldorf
Schalke v Hertha Berlin

SEPTEMBER 14
Dortmund v Eintracht Frankfurt

SEPTEMBER 15
Bayern Munich v Bayer Leverkusen
B Monchengladbach v Schalke
Dusseldorf v Hoffenheim
Mainz v Augsburg
RB Leipzig v Hanover
Wolfsburg v Hertha Berlin

SEPTEMBER 16
Freiburg v Stuttgart
Werder Bremen v Nuremberg

Nov 3...Hertha v RB Leipzig

SEPTEMBER 21
Stuttgart v Dusseldorf

SEPTEMBER 22
Augsburg v Werder Bremen
Hertha Berlin v B Monchengladbach
Hoffenheim v Dortmund
Nuremberg v Hanover
Schalke v Bayern Munich
Wolfsburg v Freiburg

SEPTEMBER 23
Bayer Leverkusen v Mainz
Eintracht Frankfurt v RB Leipzig

SEPTEMBER 25
Bayern Munich v Augsburg
Freiburg v Schalke
Hanover v Hoffenheim
Werder Bremen v Hertha Berlin

SEPTEMBER 26
B Monchengladbach v Eintracht Frankfurt
Dortmund v Nuremberg
Dusseldorf v Bayer Leverkusen
Mainz v Wolfsburg
RB Leipzig v Stuttgart

SEPTEMBER 28
Hertha Berlin v Bayern Munich

SEPTEMBER 29
Bayer Leverkusen v Dortmund
Hoffenheim v RB Leipzig
Nuremberg v Dusseldorf
Schalke v Mainz
Stuttgart v Werder Bremen
Wolfsburg v B Monchengladbach

SEPTEMBER 30
Augsburg v Freiburg
Eintracht Frankfurt v Hanover

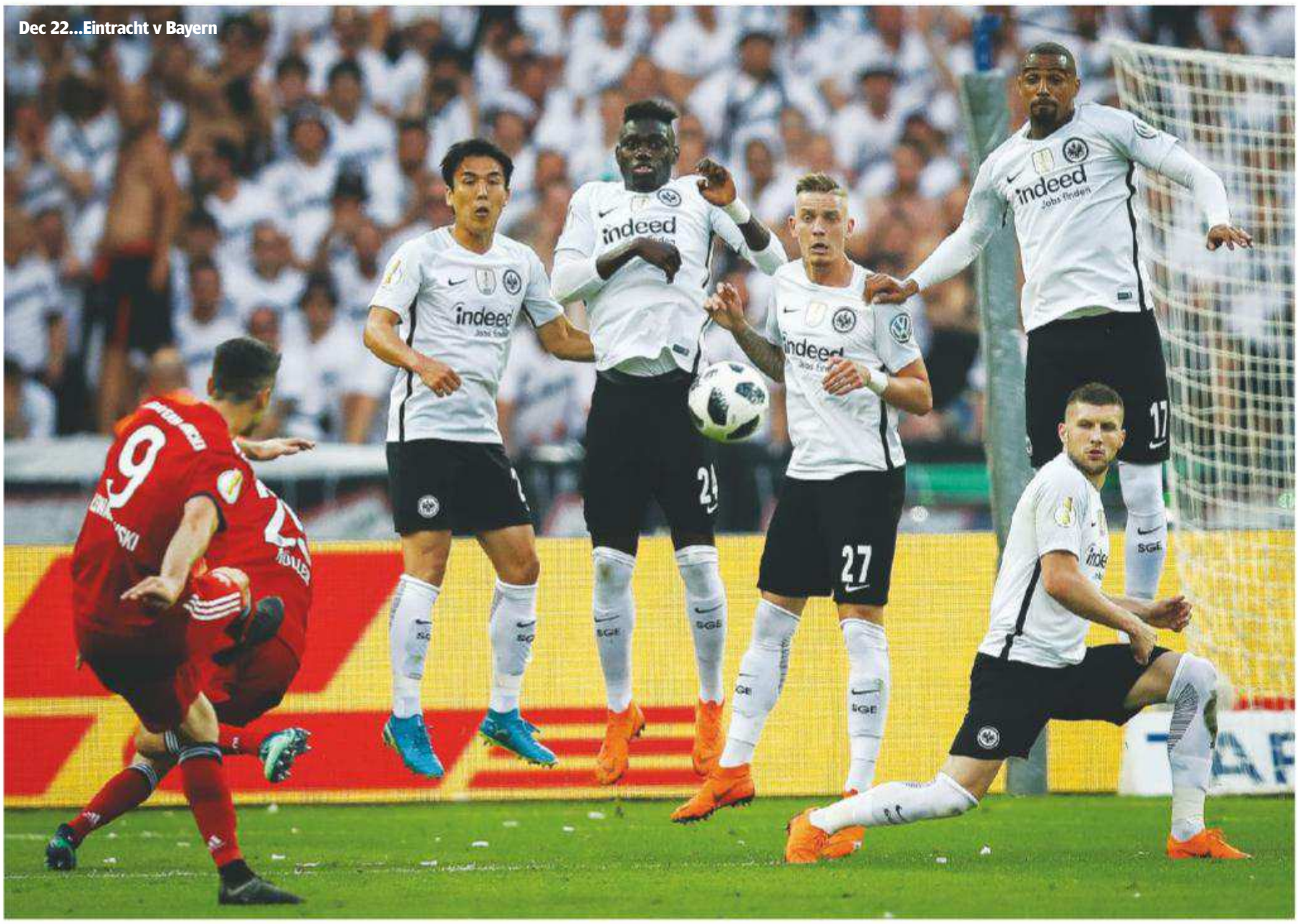
OCTOBER 6
Bayern Munich v B Monchengladbach
Dortmund v Augsburg
Dusseldorf v Schalke
Freiburg v Bayer Leverkusen
Hanover v Stuttgart
Hoffenheim v Eintracht Frankfurt
Mainz v Hertha Berlin
RB Leipzig v Nuremberg
Werder Bremen v Wolfsburg

OCTOBER 20
Augsburg v RB Leipzig
B Monchengladbach v Mainz
Bayer Leverkusen v Hanover
Eintracht Frankfurt v Dusseldorf
Hertha Berlin v Freiburg
Nuremberg v Hoffenheim
Schalke v Werder Bremen
Stuttgart v Dortmund
Wolfsburg v Bayern Munich

OCTOBER 27
Dortmund v Hertha Berlin
Dusseldorf v Wolfsburg
Freiburg v B Monchengladbach
Hanover v Augsburg
Hoffenheim v Stuttgart
Mainz v Bayern Munich
Nuremberg v Eintracht Frankfurt
RB Leipzig v Schalke
Werder Bremen v Bayer Leverkusen

NOVEMBER 3
Augsburg v Nuremberg
B Monchengladbach v Dusseldorf
Bayer Leverkusen v Hoffenheim
Bayern Munich v Freiburg
Hertha Berlin v RB Leipzig
Mainz v Werder Bremen
Schalke v Hanover
Stuttgart v Eintracht Frankfurt
Wolfsburg v Dortmund

NOVEMBER 10
Dortmund v Bayern Munich
Dusseldorf v Hertha Berlin
Eintracht Frankfurt v Schalke
Freiburg v Mainz
Hanover v Wolfsburg


Dec 22...Eintracht v Bayern

Hoffenheim v Augsburg
Nuremberg v Stuttgart
RB Leipzig v Bayer Leverkusen
Werder Bremen v B Monchengladbach

NOVEMBER 24

Augsburg v Eintracht Frankfurt
B Monchengladbach v Hanover
Bayer Leverkusen v Stuttgart
Bayern Munich v Dusseldorf
Freiburg v Werder Bremen
Hertha Berlin v Hoffenheim
Mainz v Dortmund
Schalke v Nuremberg
Wolfsburg v RB Leipzig

DECEMBER 1

Dortmund v Freiburg
Dusseldorf v Mainz
Eintracht Frankfurt v Wolfsburg
Hanover v Hertha Berlin
Hoffenheim v Schalke
Nuremberg v Bayer Leverkusen
RB Leipzig v B Monchengladbach
Stuttgart v Augsburg
Werder Bremen v Bayern Munich

DECEMBER 8

B Monchengladbach v Stuttgart
Bayer Leverkusen v Augsburg
Bayern Munich v Nuremberg
Freiburg v RB Leipzig
Hertha Berlin v Eintracht Frankfurt
Mainz v Hanover
Schalke v Dortmund
Werder Bremen v Dusseldorf
Wolfsburg v Hoffenheim

DECEMBER 15

Augsburg v Schalke
Dortmund v Werder Bremen
Dusseldorf v Freiburg
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bayer Leverkusen
Hanover v Bayern Munich
Hoffenheim v B Monchengladbach
Nuremberg v Wolfsburg
RB Leipzig v Mainz
Stuttgart v Hertha Berlin

DECEMBER 18

B Monchengladbach v Nuremberg
Bayern Munich v RB Leipzig
Dusseldorf v Dortmund
Freiburg v Hanover
Hertha Berlin v Augsburg
Mainz v Eintracht Frankfurt
Schalke v Bayer Leverkusen
Werder Bremen v Hoffenheim
Wolfsburg v Stuttgart

DECEMBER 22

Augsburg v Wolfsburg
Bayer Leverkusen v Hertha Berlin
Dortmund v B Monchengladbach
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bayern Munich
Hanover v Dusseldorf
Hoffenheim v Mainz
Nuremberg v Freiburg
RB Leipzig v Werder Bremen
Stuttgart v Schalke

JANUARY 19

Augsburg v Dusseldorf
Bayer Leverkusen v B Monchengladbach
Eintracht Frankfurt v Freiburg
Hanover v Werder Bremen
Hoffenheim v Bayern Munich
Nuremberg v Hertha Berlin
RB Leipzig v Dortmund
Schalke v Wolfsburg
Stuttgart v Mainz

JANUARY 26

B Monchengladbach v Augsburg
Bayern Munich v Stuttgart
Dortmund v Hanover
Dusseldorf v RB Leipzig
Freiburg v Hoffenheim
Hertha Berlin v Schalke
Mainz v Nuremberg
Werder Bremen v Eintracht Frankfurt
Wolfsburg v Bayer Leverkusen

April 27... Dortmund v Schalke

FEBRUARY 2

Augsburg v Mainz
Bayer Leverkusen v Bayern Munich
Eintracht Frankfurt v Dortmund
Hanover v RB Leipzig
Hertha Berlin v Wolfsburg
Hoffenheim v Dusseldorf
Nuremberg v Werder Bremen
Schalke v B Monchengladbach
Stuttgart v Freiburg

FEBRUARY 9

B Monchengladbach v Hertha Berlin
Bayern Munich v Schalke
Dortmund v Hoffenheim
Dusseldorf v Stuttgart
Freiburg v Wolfsburg
Hanover v Nuremberg
Mainz v Bayer Leverkusen
RB Leipzig v Eintracht Frankfurt
Werder Bremen v Augsburg

FEBRUARY 16

Augsburg v Bayern Munich
Bayer Leverkusen v Dusseldorf
Eintracht Frankfurt v B Monchengladbach
Hertha Berlin v Werder Bremen
Hoffenheim v Hanover
Nuremberg v Dortmund
Schalke v Freiburg
Stuttgart v RB Leipzig
Wolfsburg v Mainz

FEBRUARY 23

B Monchengladbach v Wolfsburg
Bayern Munich v Hertha Berlin
Dortmund v Bayer Leverkusen
Dusseldorf v Nuremberg
Freiburg v Augsburg
Hanover v Eintracht Frankfurt
Mainz v Schalke
RB Leipzig v Hoffenheim
Werder Bremen v Stuttgart

MARCH 2

Augsburg v Dortmund
B Monchengladbach v Bayern Munich
Bayer Leverkusen v Freiburg
Eintracht Frankfurt v Hoffenheim
Hertha Berlin v Mainz
Nuremberg v RB Leipzig
Schalke v Dusseldorf
Stuttgart v Hanover
Wolfsburg v Werder Bremen

MARCH 9

Bayern Munich v Wolfsburg
Dortmund v Stuttgart
Dusseldorf v Eintracht Frankfurt
Freiburg v Hertha Berlin
Hanover v Bayer Leverkusen
Hoffenheim v Nuremberg
Mainz v B Monchengladbach
RB Leipzig v Augsburg
Werder Bremen v Schalke

MARCH 16

Augsburg v Hanover
B Monchengladbach v Freiburg
Bayer Leverkusen v Werder Bremen
Bayern Munich v Mainz
Eintracht Frankfurt v Nuremberg
Hertha Berlin v Dortmund
Schalke v RB Leipzig
Stuttgart v Hoffenheim
Wolfsburg v Dusseldorf

MARCH 30

Dortmund v Wolfsburg
Dusseldorf v B Monchengladbach
Eintracht Frankfurt v Stuttgart
Freiburg v Bayern Munich
Hanover v Schalke
Hoffenheim v Bayer Leverkusen
Nuremberg v Augsburg
RB Leipzig v Hertha Berlin
Werder Bremen v Mainz

APRIL 6

Augsburg v Hoffenheim
B Monchengladbach v Werder Bremen
Bayer Leverkusen v RB Leipzig
Bayern Munich v Dortmund
Hertha Berlin v Dusseldorf
Mainz v Freiburg
Schalke v Eintracht Frankfurt
Stuttgart v Nuremberg
Wolfsburg v Hanover

APRIL 13

Dortmund v Mainz
Dusseldorf v Bayern Munich
Eintracht Frankfurt v Augsburg
Hanover v B Monchengladbach
Hoffenheim v Hertha Berlin
Nuremberg v Schalke
RB Leipzig v Wolfsburg
Stuttgart v Bayer Leverkusen
Werder Bremen v Freiburg

APRIL 20

Augsburg v Stuttgart
B Monchengladbach v RB Leipzig
Bayer Leverkusen v Nuremberg
Bayern Munich v Werder Bremen
Freiburg v Dortmund
Hertha Berlin v Hanover
Mainz v Dusseldorf
Schalke v Hoffenheim
Wolfsburg v Eintracht Frankfurt

APRIL 27

Augsburg v Bayer Leverkusen
Dortmund v Schalke
Dusseldorf v Werder Bremen
Eintracht Frankfurt v Hertha Berlin
Hanover v Mainz
Hoffenheim v Wolfsburg
Nuremberg v Bayern Munich
RB Leipzig v Freiburg
Stuttgart v B Monchengladbach

MAY 4

B Monchengladbach v Hoffenheim
Bayer Leverkusen v Eintracht Frankfurt
Bayern Munich v Hanover
Freiburg v Dusseldorf
Hertha Berlin v Stuttgart
Mainz v RB Leipzig
Schalke v Augsburg
Werder Bremen v Dortmund
Wolfsburg v Nuremberg

MAY 11

Augsburg v Hertha Berlin
Bayer Leverkusen v Schalke
Dortmund v Dusseldorf
Eintracht Frankfurt v Mainz
Hanover v Freiburg
Hoffenheim v Werder Bremen
Nuremberg v B Monchengladbach
RB Leipzig v Bayern Munich
Stuttgart v Wolfsburg

MAY 18

B Monchengladbach v Dortmund
Bayern Munich v Eintracht Frankfurt
Dusseldorf v Hanover
Freiburg v Nuremberg
Hertha Berlin v Bayer Leverkusen
Mainz v Hoffenheim
Schalke v Stuttgart
Werder Bremen v RB Leipzig
Wolfsburg v Augsburg

ITALY: SERIE A

AUGUST 18
Atalanta v Frosinone
Bologna v SPAL

AUGUST 19
Chievo v Juventus
Empoli v Cagliari
Lazio v Napoli
Milan v Genoa
Parma v Udinese
Sampdoria v Fiorentina
Sassuolo v Internazionale
Torino v Roma

AUGUST 25
Cagliari v Sassuolo
Fiorentina v Chievo

AUGUST 26
Frosinone v Bologna
Genoa v Empoli
Internazionale v Torino
Juventus v Lazio
Napoli v Milan
Roma v Atalanta
SPAL v Parma

AUGUST 27
Udinese v Sampdoria

AUGUST 31
Atalanta v Cagliari

SEPTEMBER 1
Bologna v Internazionale
Chievo v Empoli

SEPTEMBER 2
Fiorentina v Udinese
Lazio v Frosinone
Milan v Roma
Parma v Juventus
Sampdoria v Napoli
Sassuolo v Genoa
Torino v SPAL

SEPTEMBER 16
Cagliari v Milan
Empoli v Lazio
Frosinone v Sampdoria
Genoa v Bologna
Internazionale v Parma
Juventus v Sassuolo
Napoli v Fiorentina
Roma v Chievo
SPAL v Atalanta
Udinese v Torino

SEPTEMBER 23
Bologna v Roma
Chievo v Udinese
Fiorentina v SPAL
Frosinone v Juventus
Lazio v Genoa
Milan v Atalanta
Parma v Cagliari
Sampdoria v Internazionale
Sassuolo v Empoli
Torino v Napoli

SEPTEMBER 26
Atalanta v Torino
Cagliari v Sampdoria
Empoli v Milan
Genoa v Chievo
Internazionale v Fiorentina
Juventus v Bologna
Napoli v Parma
Roma v Frosinone
SPAL v Sassuolo
Udinese v Lazio

SEPTEMBER 30
Bologna v Udinese
Chievo v Torino
Fiorentina v Atalanta
Frosinone v Genoa
Internazionale v Cagliari
Juventus v Napoli
Parma v Empoli

Oct 7...Atalanta v Sampdoria

Roma v Lazio
Sampdoria v SPAL
Sassuolo v Milan

OCTOBER 7
Atalanta v Sampdoria
Cagliari v Bologna
Empoli v Roma
Genoa v Parma
Lazio v Fiorentina
Milan v Chievo
Napoli v Sassuolo
SPAL v Internazionale
Torino v Frosinone
Udinese v Juventus

OCTOBER 21
Bologna v Torino
Chievo v Atalanta
Fiorentina v Cagliari
Frosinone v Empoli
Internazionale v Milan
Juventus v Genoa
Parma v Lazio
Roma v SPAL
Sampdoria v Sassuolo
Udinese v Napoli

OCTOBER 28
Atalanta v Parma
Cagliari v Chievo
Empoli v Juventus
Genoa v Udinese
Lazio v Internazionale
Milan v Sampdoria
Napoli v Roma
Sassuolo v Bologna
SPAL v Frosinone
Torino v Fiorentina

NOVEMBER 4
Bologna v Atalanta
Chievo v Sassuolo
Fiorentina v Roma
Internazionale v Genoa
Juventus v Cagliari
Lazio v SPAL
Napoli v Empoli
Parma v Frosinone
Sampdoria v Torino
Udinese v Milan

NOVEMBER 11
Atalanta v Internazionale
Chievo v Bologna
Empoli v Udinese
Frosinone v Fiorentina
Genoa v Napoli

Milan v Juventus
Roma v Sampdoria
Sassuolo v Lazio
SPAL v Cagliari
Torino v Parma

NOVEMBER 25
Bologna v Fiorentina
Cagliari v Torino
Empoli v Atalanta
Genoa v Sampdoria
Internazionale v Frosinone
Juventus v SPAL
Lazio v Milan
Napoli v Chievo
Parma v Sassuolo
Udinese v Roma

DECEMBER 2
Atalanta v Napoli
Chievo v Lazio
Fiorentina v Juventus
Frosinone v Cagliari
Milan v Parma
Roma v Internazionale
Sampdoria v Bologna
Sassuolo v Udinese
SPAL v Empoli
Torino v Genoa

DECEMBER 9
Cagliari v Roma
Empoli v Bologna
Genoa v SPAL
Juventus v Internazionale
Lazio v Sampdoria
Milan v Torino
Napoli v Frosinone
Parma v Chievo
Sassuolo v Fiorentina
Udinese v Atalanta

DECEMBER 16
Atalanta v Lazio
Bologna v Milan
Cagliari v Napoli
Fiorentina v Empoli
Frosinone v Sassuolo
Internazionale v Udinese
Roma v Genoa
Sampdoria v Parma
SPAL v Chievo
Torino v Juventus

DECEMBER 22
Chievo v Internazionale
Empoli v Sampdoria
Genoa v Atalanta

Juventus v Roma
Lazio v Cagliari
Milan v Fiorentina
Napoli v SPAL
Parma v Bologna
Sassuolo v Torino
Udinese v Frosinone

DECEMBER 26
Atalanta v Juventus
Bologna v Lazio
Cagliari v Genoa
Fiorentina v Parma
Frosinone v Milan
Internazionale v Napoli
Roma v Sassuolo
Sampdoria v Chievo
SPAL v Udinese
Torino v Empoli

Feb 10...Fiorentina v Napoli

DECEMBER 29
Chievo v Frosinone
Empoli v Internazionale
Genoa v Fiorentina
Juventus v Sampdoria
Lazio v Torino
Milan v SPAL
Napoli v Bologna
Parma v Roma
Sassuolo v Atalanta
Udinese v Cagliari

JANUARY 20
Cagliari v Empoli
Fiorentina v Sampdoria
Frosinone v Atalanta
Genoa v Milan
Internazionale v Sassuolo
Juventus v Chievo
Napoli v Lazio
Roma v Torino
SPAL v Bologna
Udinese v Parma

JANUARY 27
Atalanta v Roma
Bologna v Frosinone
Chievo v Fiorentina
Empoli v Genoa
Lazio v Juventus
Milan v Napoli
Parma v SPAL
Sampdoria v Udinese
Sassuolo v Cagliari
Torino v Internazionale

FEBRUARY 3
Cagliari v Atalanta
Empoli v Chievo
Frosinone v Lazio
Genoa v Sassuolo
Internazionale v Bologna
Juventus v Parma
Napoli v Sampdoria
Roma v Milan
SPAL v Torino
Udinese v Fiorentina

FEBRUARY 10
Atalanta v SPAL
Bologna v Genoa
Chievo v Roma
Fiorentina v Napoli
Lazio v Empoli
Milan v Cagliari
Parma v Internazionale
Sampdoria v Frosinone
Sassuolo v Juventus
Torino v Udinese

FEBRUARY 17
Atalanta v Milan
Cagliari v Parma
Empoli v Sassuolo
Genoa v Lazio
Internazionale v Sampdoria
Juventus v Frosinone
Napoli v Torino
Roma v Bologna
SPAL v Fiorentina
Udinese v Chievo

FEBRUARY 24
Bologna v Juventus
Chievo v Genoa
Fiorentina v Internazionale
Frosinone v Roma
Lazio v Udinese
Milan v Empoli
Parma v Napoli
Sampdoria v Cagliari
Sassuolo v SPAL
Torino v Atalanta

MARCH 3
Atalanta v Fiorentina
Cagliari v Internazionale
Empoli v Parma
Genoa v Frosinone
Lazio v Roma
Milan v Sassuolo
Napoli v Juventus
SPAL v Sampdoria
Torino v Chievo
Udinese v Bologna

MARCH 10
Bologna v Cagliari
Chievo v Milan
Fiorentina v Lazio
Frosinone v Torino
Internazionale v SPAL
Juventus v Udinese
Parma v Genoa

Mar 17...Milan v Inter

Roma v Empoli
Sampdoria v Atalanta
Sassuolo v Napoli

MARCH 17
Atalanta v Chievo
Cagliari v Fiorentina
Empoli v Frosinone
Genoa v Juventus
Lazio v Parma
Milan v Internazionale
Napoli v Udinese
Sassuolo v Sampdoria
SPAL v Roma
Torino v Bologna

MARCH 31
Bologna v Sassuolo
Chievo v Cagliari
Fiorentina v Torino
Frosinone v SPAL
Internazionale v Lazio
Juventus v Empoli
Parma v Atalanta
Roma v Napoli
Sampdoria v Milan
Udinese v Genoa

APRIL 3
Atalanta v Bologna
Cagliari v Juventus
Empoli v Napoli
Frosinone v Parma
Genoa v Internazionale
Milan v Udinese
Roma v Fiorentina
Sassuolo v Chievo
SPAL v Lazio
Torino v Sampdoria

APRIL 7
Bologna v Chievo
Cagliari v SPAL
Fiorentina v Frosinone
Internazionale v Atalanta
Juventus v Milan
Lazio v Sassuolo
Napoli v Genoa
Parma v Torino
Sampdoria v Roma
Udinese v Empoli

APRIL 14
Atalanta v Empoli
Chievo v Napoli
Fiorentina v Bologna
Frosinone v Internazionale
Milan v Lazio
Roma v Udinese
Sampdoria v Genoa
Sassuolo v Parma
SPAL v Juventus
Torino v Cagliari

APRIL 20
Bologna v Sampdoria
Cagliari v Frosinone
Empoli v SPAL
Genoa v Torino
Internazionale v Roma
Juventus v Fiorentina
Lazio v Chievo
Napoli v Atalanta
Parma v Milan
Udinese v Sassuolo

APRIL 28
Atalanta v Udinese
Bologna v Empoli
Chievo v Parma
Fiorentina v Sassuolo
Frosinone v Napoli
Internazionale v Juventus
Roma v Cagliari
Sampdoria v Lazio
SPAL v Genoa
Torino v Milan

MAY 5
Chievo v SPAL
Empoli v Fiorentina
Genoa v Roma
Juventus v Torino
Lazio v Atalanta
Milan v Bologna
Napoli v Cagliari
Parma v Sampdoria
Sassuolo v Frosinone
Udinese v Internazionale

MAY 12
Atalanta v Genoa
Bologna v Parma
Cagliari v Lazio
Fiorentina v Milan
Frosinone v Udinese
Internazionale v Chievo
Roma v Juventus
Sampdoria v Empoli
SPAL v Napoli
Torino v Sassuolo

MAY 19
Chievo v Sampdoria
Empoli v Torino
Genoa v Cagliari
Juventus v Atalanta
Lazio v Bologna
Milan v Frosinone
Napoli v Internazionale
Parma v Fiorentina
Sassuolo v Roma
Udinese v SPAL

MAY 26
Atalanta v Sassuolo
Bologna v Napoli
Cagliari v Udinese
Fiorentina v Genoa
Frosinone v Chievo
Internazionale v Empoli
Roma v Parma
Sampdoria v Juventus
SPAL v Milan
Torino v Lazio

SPAIN: LA LIGA

AUGUST 17
Betis v Levante
Girona v Valladolid

AUGUST 18
Barcelona v Alaves
Celta Vigo v Espanyol
Villarreal v Real Sociedad

AUGUST 19
Eibar v Huesca
Rayo Vallecano v Sevilla
Real Madrid v Getafe

AUGUST 20
Ath Bilbao v Leganes
Valencia v Atl Madrid

AUGUST 26
Alaves v Betis
Ath Bilbao v Huesca
Atl Madrid v Rayo Vallecano
Espanyol v Valencia
Getafe v Eibar
Girona v Real Madrid
Leganes v Real Sociedad
Levante v Celta Vigo
Sevilla v Villarreal
Valladolid v Barcelona

SEPTEMBER 2
Alaves v Espanyol
Barcelona v Huesca
Betis v Sevilla
Celta Vigo v Atl Madrid
Eibar v Real Sociedad
Getafe v Valladolid
Levante v Valencia
Rayo Vallecano v Ath Bilbao
Real Madrid v Leganes
Villarreal v Girona

SEPTEMBER 16
Ath Bilbao v Real Madrid
Atl Madrid v Eibar
Espanyol v Levante
Girona v Celta Vigo
Huesca v Rayo Vallecano

Dec 9...Valencia v Sevilla

Leganes v Villarreal
Real Sociedad v Barcelona
Sevilla v Getafe
Valencia v Betis
Valladolid v Alaves

SEPTEMBER 23
Barcelona v Girona
Betis v Ath Bilbao
Celta Vigo v Valladolid
Eibar v Leganes
Getafe v Atl Madrid
Huesca v Real Sociedad
Levante v Sevilla
Rayo Vallecano v Alaves
Real Madrid v Espanyol
Villarreal v Valencia

SEPTEMBER 26
Alaves v Getafe
Ath Bilbao v Villarreal
Atl Madrid v Huesca
Espanyol v Eibar
Girona v Betis
Leganes v Barcelona
Real Sociedad v Rayo Vallecano
Sevilla v Real Madrid
Valencia v Celta Vigo
Valladolid v Levante

SEPTEMBER 30
Barcelona v Ath Bilbao
Betis v Leganes
Celta Vigo v Getafe
Eibar v Sevilla
Huesca v Girona
Levante v Alaves
Rayo Vallecano v Espanyol
Real Madrid v Atl Madrid
Real Sociedad v Valencia
Villarreal v Valladolid

OCTOBER 7
Alaves v Real Madrid
Ath Bilbao v Real Sociedad
Atl Madrid v Betis
Espanyol v Villarreal
Getafe v Levante
Girona v Eibar
Leganes v Rayo Vallecano
Sevilla v Celta Vigo
Valencia v Barcelona
Valladolid v Huesca

OCTOBER 21
Barcelona v Sevilla
Betis v Valladolid
Celta Vigo v Alaves
Eibar v Ath Bilbao
Huesca v Espanyol
Rayo Vallecano v Getafe
Real Madrid v Levante
Real Sociedad v Girona
Valencia v Leganes
Villarreal v Atl Madrid

OCTOBER 28
Alaves v Villarreal
Ath Bilbao v Valencia
Atl Madrid v Real Sociedad
Barcelona v Real Madrid
Celta Vigo v Eibar
Getafe v Betis
Girona v Rayo Vallecano
Levante v Leganes
Sevilla v Huesca
Valladolid v Espanyol

NOVEMBER 4
Betis v Celta Vigo
Eibar v Alaves
Espanyol v Ath Bilbao
Huesca v Getafe
Leganes v Atl Madrid
Rayo Vallecano v Barcelona
Real Madrid v Valladolid
Real Sociedad v Sevilla
Valencia v Girona
Villarreal v Levante

NOVEMBER 11
Alaves v Huesca
Atl Madrid v Ath Bilbao
Barcelona v Betis
Celta Vigo v Real Madrid
Getafe v Valencia
Girona v Leganes
Levante v Real Sociedad
Rayo Vallecano v Villarreal
Sevilla v Espanyol
Valladolid v Eibar

NOVEMBER 25
Ath Bilbao v Getafe
Atl Madrid v Barcelona
Eibar v Real Madrid
Espanyol v Girona
Huesca v Levante
Leganes v Alaves
Real Sociedad v Celta Vigo
Sevilla v Valladolid
Valencia v Rayo Vallecano
Villarreal v Betis

DECEMBER 2
Alaves v Sevilla
Barcelona v Villarreal
Betis v Real Sociedad
Celta Vigo v Huesca
Getafe v Espanyol
Girona v Atl Madrid
Levante v Ath Bilbao
Rayo Vallecano v Eibar
Real Madrid v Valencia
Valladolid v Leganes

DECEMBER 9
Ath Bilbao v Girona
Atl Madrid v Alaves
Betis v Rayo Vallecano
Eibar v Levante
Espanyol v Barcelona
Huesca v Real Madrid
Leganes v Getafe

Oct 28...Barcelona v Real Madrid

Real Sociedad v Valladolid
Valencia v Sevilla
Villarreal v Celta Vigo

DECEMBER 16

Alaves v Ath Bilbao
Celta Vigo v Leganes
Eibar v Valencia
Espanyol v Betis
Getafe v Real Sociedad
Huesca v Villarreal
Levante v Barcelona
Real Madrid v Rayo Vallecano
Sevilla v Girona
Valladolid v Atl Madrid

DECEMBER 22

Ath Bilbao v Valladolid
Atl Madrid v Espanyol
Barcelona v Celta Vigo
Betis v Eibar
Girona v Getafe
Leganes v Sevilla
Rayo Vallecano v Levante
Real Sociedad v Alaves
Valencia v Huesca
Villarreal v Real Madrid

JANUARY 6

Alaves v Valencia
Celta Vigo v Ath Bilbao
Eibar v Villarreal
Espanyol v Leganes
Getafe v Barcelona
Huesca v Betis
Levante v Girona
Real Madrid v Real Sociedad
Sevilla v Atl Madrid
Valladolid v Rayo Vallecano

JANUARY 13

Ath Bilbao v Sevilla
Atl Madrid v Levante
Barcelona v Eibar
Betis v Real Madrid
Girona v Alaves
Leganes v Huesca
Rayo Vallecano v Celta Vigo
Real Sociedad v Espanyol
Valencia v Valladolid
Villarreal v Getafe

JANUARY 20

Barcelona v Leganes
Betis v Girona
Celta Vigo v Valencia
Eibar v Espanyol
Getafe v Alaves
Huesca v Atl Madrid
Levante v Valladolid
Rayo Vallecano v Real Sociedad
Real Madrid v Sevilla
Villarreal v Ath Bilbao

JANUARY 27

Alaves v Rayo Vallecano
Ath Bilbao v Betis
Atl Madrid v Getafe
Espanyol v Real Madrid
Girona v Barcelona
Leganes v Eibar
Real Sociedad v Huesca
Sevilla v Levante
Valencia v Villarreal
Valladolid v Celta Vigo

FEBRUARY 3

Barcelona v Valencia
Betis v Atl Madrid
Celta Vigo v Sevilla
Eibar v Girona
Huesca v Valladolid
Levante v Getafe
Rayo Vallecano v Leganes
Real Madrid v Alaves
Real Sociedad v Ath Bilbao
Villarreal v Espanyol

FEBRUARY 10

Alaves v Levante
Ath Bilbao v Barcelona
Atl Madrid v Real Madrid

Jan 20...Villarreal v Athletic Bilbao

Espanyol v Rayo Vallecano
Getafe v Celta Vigo
Girona v Huesca
Leganes v Betis
Sevilla v Eibar
Valencia v Real Sociedad
Valladolid v Villarreal

FEBRUARY 17

Barcelona v Valladolid
Betis v Alaves
Celta Vigo v Levante
Eibar v Getafe
Huesca v Ath Bilbao
Rayo Vallecano v Atl Madrid
Real Madrid v Girona
Real Sociedad v Leganes
Valencia v Espanyol
Villarreal v Sevilla

FEBRUARY 24

Alaves v Celta Vigo
Ath Bilbao v Eibar
Atl Madrid v Villarreal
Espanyol v Huesca
Getafe v Rayo Vallecano
Girona v Real Sociedad
Leganes v Valencia
Levante v Real Madrid
Sevilla v Barcelona
Valladolid v Betis

MARCH 3

Betis v Getafe
Eibar v Celta Vigo
Espanyol v Valladolid
Huesca v Sevilla
Leganes v Levante
Rayo Vallecano v Girona
Real Madrid v Barcelona
Real Sociedad v Atl Madrid
Valencia v Ath Bilbao
Villarreal v Alaves

MARCH 10

Alaves v Eibar
Ath Bilbao v Espanyol
Atl Madrid v Leganes
Barcelona v Rayo Vallecano
Celta Vigo v Betis
Getafe v Huesca
Girona v Valencia
Levante v Villarreal
Sevilla v Real Sociedad
Valladolid v Real Madrid

MARCH 17

Ath Bilbao v Atl Madrid
Betis v Barcelona
Eibar v Valladolid
Espanyol v Sevilla
Huesca v Alaves
Leganes v Girona
Real Madrid v Celta Vigo
Real Sociedad v Levante
Valencia v Getafe
Villarreal v Rayo Vallecano

MARCH 31

Alaves v Atl Madrid
Barcelona v Espanyol
Celta Vigo v Villarreal
Getafe v Leganes
Girona v Ath Bilbao
Levante v Eibar
Rayo Vallecano v Betis
Real Madrid v Huesca
Sevilla v Valencia
Valladolid v Real Sociedad

APRIL 3

Ath Bilbao v Levante
Atl Madrid v Girona
Eibar v Rayo Vallecano
Espanyol v Getafe
Huesca v Celta Vigo
Leganes v Valladolid
Real Sociedad v Betis
Sevilla v Alaves
Valencia v Real Madrid
Villarreal v Barcelona

APRIL 7

Alaves v Leganes
Barcelona v Atl Madrid
Betis v Villarreal
Celta Vigo v Real Sociedad
Getafe v Ath Bilbao
Girona v Espanyol
Levante v Huesca
Rayo Vallecano v Valencia
Real Madrid v Eibar
Valladolid v Sevilla

APRIL 14

Ath Bilbao v Rayo Vallecano
Atl Madrid v Celta Vigo
Espanyol v Alaves
Girona v Villarreal
Huesca v Barcelona
Leganes v Real Madrid
Real Sociedad v Eibar
Sevilla v Betis
Valencia v Levante
Valladolid v Getafe

APRIL 24

Alaves v Valladolid
Barcelona v Real Sociedad
Betis v Valencia
Celta Vigo v Girona
Eibar v Atl Madrid
Getafe v Sevilla
Levante v Espanyol
Rayo Vallecano v Huesca
Real Madrid v Ath Bilbao
Villarreal v Leganes

APRIL 28

Alaves v Barcelona
Atl Madrid v Valencia
Espanyol v Celta Vigo
Getafe v Real Madrid
Huesca v Eibar
Leganes v Ath Bilbao
Levante v Betis
Real Sociedad v Villarreal
Sevilla v Rayo Vallecano
Valladolid v Girona

MAY 5

Ath Bilbao v Alaves
Atl Madrid v Valladolid
Barcelona v Levante
Betis v Espanyol
Girona v Sevilla
Leganes v Celta Vigo
Rayo Vallecano v Real Madrid
Real Sociedad v Getafe
Valencia v Eibar
Villarreal v Huesca

MAY 12

Alaves v Real Sociedad
Celta Vigo v Barcelona
Eibar v Betis
Espanyol v Atl Madrid
Getafe v Girona
Huesca v Valencia
Levante v Rayo Vallecano
Real Madrid v Villarreal
Sevilla v Leganes
Valladolid v Ath Bilbao

MAY 19

Ath Bilbao v Celta Vigo
Atl Madrid v Sevilla
Barcelona v Getafe
Betis v Huesca
Girona v Levante
Leganes v Espanyol
Rayo Vallecano v Valladolid
Real Sociedad v Real Madrid
Valencia v Alaves
Villarreal v Eibar

MAY 26

Alaves v Girona
Celta Vigo v Rayo Vallecano
Eibar v Barcelona
Espanyol v Real Sociedad
Getafe v Villarreal
Huesca v Leganes
Levante v Atl Madrid
Real Madrid v Betis
Sevilla v Ath Bilbao
Valladolid v Valencia

JULY 12-AUGUST 1, 2018

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Sub... Wayne Rooney

Thursday July 12

ITALY: American hedge fund Elliott Management takes control of Milan after buyer Yonghong Li fails to make a €32m loan payment.
POLAND: Jerzy Brzeczek leaves Wisla Plock and replaces Adam Nawalka as national coach.
PORTUGAL: Sporting, who want £48m in compensation, report Wolves and Rui Patricio to FIFA after the goalkeeper joined the Premier League side in June. He is one of several players to have terminated their contracts with the club after an attack by fans.
SPAIN: Barcelona sign Sevilla's 23-year-old centre-back Clement Lenglet for €35.9m.

Friday July 13

ENGLAND: Chelsea sack Antonio Conte after two years as manager.
QATAR: Tunisia's World Cup coach Nabil Maaloul quits to take charge of Qatari's Al Duhail.
TANZANIA: Azam retain the CECAFA Club Cup, beating Simba 2-1 in the Final.

Saturday July 14

ENGLAND: Maurizio Sarri, who led Napoli to two second-place finishes in three seasons, is named Chelsea manager. He is joined by midfielder Jorginho, who also arrives from the Italian club for a reported £57m.
USA: Wayne Rooney comes off the bench for his debut as DC United beat Vancouver Whitecaps 3-1 in the first MLS game at their new Audi Field Stadium.
WORLD CUP: Belgium take third place by beating England 2-0 in the play-off game.

Sunday July 15

ARGENTINA: National coach Jorge Sampaoli "mutually agrees" to terminate his contract.
DENMARK: Vendsyssel celebrate their first-ever game in the Danish Superliga by beating OB 3-2.
WORLD CUP: France beat Croatia 4-2 in the Final and are crowned world champions for a second time.

Monday July 16

EURO U19s: Runners-up in 2017, Portugal kick off this year's finals in Finland with a 3-1 over Norway.

Tuesday July 17

AUSTRALIA: Central Coast Mariners confirm they are in talks with 31-year-old eight-time Olympic sprint champion Usain Bolt about a six-week trial.
ICELAND: Heimir Hallgrimsson steps down after seven years as coach of the national side.
NIGERIA: The Nigeria Professional Football League, which is due to resume tomorrow after a World Cup break, is postponed indefinitely due to a leadership battle within the Nigerian Football Federation.
PANAMA: Hernan Dario Gomez resigns as national coach.
SOUTH AFRICA: Former holders Mamelodi Sundowns suffer a shock 1-0 defeat at Port of Togo and are still yet to win a CAF Champions League game in West Africa.
WALES: Trailing 5-0 from the first leg in Macedonia, The New Saints almost complete an extraordinary comeback in the Champions League, beating Shkendija 4-0 in the return.

Debut...Vendsyssel make a winning start

Fightback...The New Saints (in hoops) almost overturn a 5-0 first-leg deficit against Shkendija in the Champions League

Wednesday July 18

ENGLAND: Former Chelsea and Italy striker Gianfranco Zola returns to the club as assistant to new manager Maurizio Sarri.

Thursday July 19

BULGARIA: Three players from each side are sent off as CSKA Sofia win a Europa League penalty shoot-out against Riga in Latvia.
ENGLAND: Liverpool make Alisson the world's most expensive keeper as they sign the 25-year-old from Roma for £67m.
NORWAY: Rosenborg sack coach Kare Ingebrigtsen the day after they beat Iceland's Valur 3-2 on ➤

Bonaire

STEVE MENARY

Continental action...Real Rincon (in blue)

Real Rincon lead the way

League winners have success in the Caribbean Club Championship

CONCACAF's controversial power grab in the Caribbean may have upset some in the region, but it is certainly benefitting Bonaire, as the Dutch-controlled island barely registered in the old Caribbean Football Union (CFU).

Bonaire is now in the CFU and a full CONCACAF member, but it still retains support from the Dutch FA (KNVB), which funds youth programmes run by Errol Sint Jago, a former striker from Bonaire who played for Netherlands Antilles.

Sint Jago, who was with Telstar for the 1981-82 season in Holland, has been working for the KNVB's World Coach programme since 2003. Over the last decade he has run training camps for nearly 300 children and adults on Bonaire and says: "The important thing is that they have a lot of youth teams on the island. Soccer is the number one sport.

"The local league gets 600 to 800 people watching matches and for an island of 20,000 people that's pretty good."

Founded in 1959, Vespo is the oldest of Bonaire's nine clubs, whose names mirror the island's myriad influences: Atletiko Tera Kora (ATK), Juventus, Uruguay, Real Rincon, Estrellas, Atletiko Flamingo, Ariba Peru and Vitesse.

Support...a Real Rincon fan

> "The local league gets 600 to 800 people watching ...for an island of 20,000 that's good"
> Errol Sint Jago

The only chance of these teams to qualifying for a regional competition came through the Antillean Cup, which was an end-of-season tournament between the top two sides from Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao. Two sides then qualified for the CONCACAF Champions Cup, and Juventus featured in 1989 – after finishing Antillean Cup runners-up – but as the smallest island, clubs from Bonaire faced an uphill task to qualify.

But after CONCACAF began running CFU competitions last year, Bonaire's champions Real Rincon were handed a place in the second tier of this year's new Caribbean Club Championship. And they surpassed expectations by winning Group B in the Dominican Republic after beating Grenada's Hard Rock 3-1 and drawing 2-2 with Avenues United from St Vincent & the Grenadines.

Real then lost 2-0 in the semi-finals to eventual winners Club Franciscain from Martinique but finished third with a 2-0 victory over Nacional from Aruba.

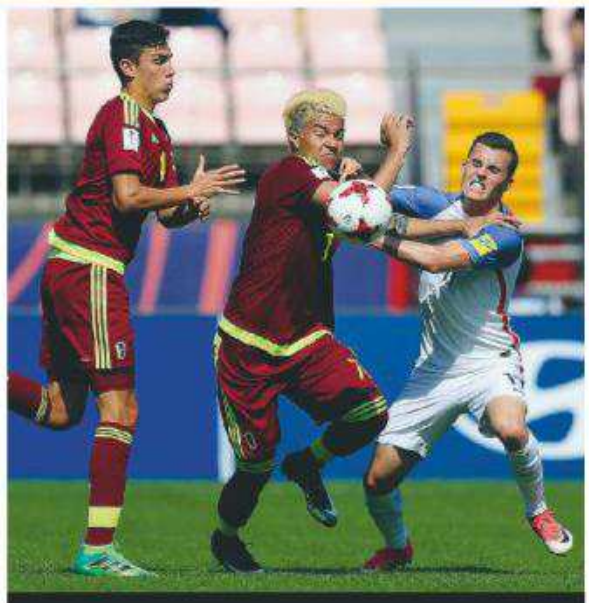
Those result justified CONCACAF's decision to make Bonaire a full member in 2013 and, along with five other non-FIFA members in the Caribbean, Bonaire is now being helped by FIFA through its Forward Territories fund to enable participation in the new CONCACAF League of Nations. WS

South America

TIM VICKERY

Searching for crumbs of comfort

Continent must pick itself up before Qatar 2022



Future...Venezuela's Adalberto Penaranda (centre)

Crumbs of comfort are not easy to find for South America following the 2018 World Cup. A fourth consecutive European win, with three of those triumphs emerging from all-European Finals, and no South American interest beyond the quarter-finals. There is no doubt it was all a huge disappointment.

But, on the other hand, eventual winners France were made to work for a narrow group win against Peru, who until comparatively recently were the whipping boys on their own continent, especially away from home. Peru performed with credit in Russia and gave another indication of South America's strength in depth. With a young side they can hope to be back, and better, in 2022.

First, of course, they will have to qualify, which may not be easy. Altitude aside, Bolivia would not seem to have a great deal to contribute to the next qualification campaign, while Ecuador were the early leaders in the race to Russia, only to fall away alarmingly. They are currently negotiating with Hernan Dario Gomez, the Colombian who took them to their World Cup debut in 2002 and who was in charge of Panama at this year's finals

Elsewhere, Venezuela will have dreams of making it to a first-ever World Cup, building their hopes around the group of players who reached the Final of last year's Under-20 tournament, Chile have already began their rebuilding process and Paraguay have some interesting attacking midfielders to add to their customary resilience.

However, none of these sides are likely to be serious challengers to win the World Cup in 2022. But four nations are entitled to believe that, with a break or two along the way, they might have enough to put in a challenge.

One is Colombia, who let themselves down in their loss to England. Their 2018 tragedy was that the combined playmaking talents of James Rodriguez and Juan Quintero were only really available for one game – the 3-0 win over Poland. On the plus side, they would seem to have recuperated Quintero after his wilderness years, and he and Rodriguez could hit a peak together in Qatar.

This type of midfield quality is vital because one area in which South America has clearly fallen behind the best Europeans is in the production of midfielders capable of running the game from box to box.

Uruguay look best equipped to meet this challenge. Although Rodrigo Bentancur was not always at his best in Russia, he showed flashes of genuine quality, Lucas Torreira has emerged as an all-pitch problem solver and they also have Federico Valverde once he has fully recovered from the injury problems that cost him momentum earlier in the year. The strike pairing of Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani will surely be past their best in 2022, so much may depend on the development of Maxi Gomez as a replacement. But in terms of midfield resources, Uruguay should be stronger in Qatar than they were in Russia.

> One area in which South America has clearly fallen behind the best Europeans is in the production of midfielders capable of running the game from box to box

Brazil must envy Uruguay's strength in this area. Part of the story of their Russian experience lies in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to shoehorn Phillippe Coutinho into operating as a midfield all-rounder. Some midfield hopes have disappointed on contact with top-class European football but perhaps Arthur, the Iniesta-lookalike just signed by Barcelona, will be different. If so, Brazil could win the second Asian World Cup – just as they did in the first in 2002.

And then there is Argentina. Maybe their 2022 side will be built around the talents of Giovani Lo Celso, a playmaker who has been learning his trade in France with Paris Saint-Germain.

Lo Celso was one of just three members of Argentina's squad who saw no action in Russia – which was somewhat curious as he had looked particularly impressive in their only warm-up friendly, against Haiti. He could be an important player in Qatar, but first Argentina have to get there. And as it stands, they have no coach and no clear plan.

Fifteen of the squad that went to Russia are over 30 so a complete rebuilding process will be needed and there is currently a dearth of outstanding young players in many positions.

Things could get worse before they get better. WS

Hope...Giovani Lo Celso (left) with Lionel Messi

Close...Peru's Edison Flores (left) and Miguel Trauco battle with Kylian Mbappe of France

➤ aggregate in the Champions League with an injury-time penalty.

Friday July 20

GERMANY: Hanover will appeal a ruling denying them exemption from the 50+1 ruling in order to allow club president Martin Kind to take control.
ITALY: Milan will take part in the Europa League after winning an appeal at the Court of Arbitration for Sport following a ban by UEFA over Financial Fairplay.
SENEGAL: Referee Malang Diedhiou, who was involved in four matches at the World Cup in Russia, announces his retirement.

Saturday July 21

USA: Josef Martinez sets a new MLS record with the sixth hat-trick of his career as Atlanta United beat DC United 3-1.

Sunday July 22

GERMANY: Mesut Ozil announces his international retirement.
JAPAN: Andres Iniesta's J.League debut ends in defeat as Vissel Kobe lose 3-0 to Shonan Bellmare. His former Spain team-mate Fernando Torres also makes a losing start as Sagan Tosu are beaten 1-0 by Vegalta Sendai.

Monday July 23

CHINA: Assistant coach Hao Haitao replaces former Portugal boss Paulo Bento on an interim basis at Chongqing Lifan.
ENGLAND: Former Leeds United and England defender Paul Madeley dies, aged 73.
ETHIOPIA: Having avoided games against each other since the start of a border war in 1998, Ethiopia and Eritrea agree to a friendly in August.
ITALY: Parma striker Emanuele Calaio is banned for two years for match-fixing and his club deducted five points ahead of the upcoming Serie A season.
SCOTLAND: Hearts are docked two points in their Scottish League Cup group for fielding an ineligible player, Andrew Irving, in a 2-1 victory over Cove Rangers.
VENEZUELA: Apertura winners Zamora begin their Clausura campaign with a 3-1 win at home to Deportivo La Guaira.

Tuesday July 24

ENGLAND: Everton buy Brazilian winger Richarlison from Watford in a potential £50m deal that would make him the club's record signing.
GERMANY: Bayer Leverkusen winger Karim Bellarabi is taken ➤

➤ to hospital after collapsing during a friendly against Wuppertal.
NIGERIA: After months of political in-fighting, and with the threat of a FIFA ban hanging over the country, Nigeria restores Amaju Pinnick as its federation president.
SPAIN: Barcelona agree to sign Bordeaux winger Malcom for €41m – a day after Roma announced a deal subject to a medical and personal terms.

Wednesday July 25

BRAZIL: Tite agrees a four-year contract renewal to lead Brazil's national team.
COLOMBIA: Deportes Tolima, who beat Atletico Nacional in the Apertura play-off Final, win 2-1 away to the same team in their opening Clausura fixture.
ENGLAND: Brighton sign Iran international winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh from AZ for a reported club record fee of £17m.
ITALY: Former Milan player and coach Leonardo, who won the World Cup with Brazil in 1994, is appointed as the club's new sporting director.
PHILIPPINES: Ceres Negros beat Global Cebu 6-1 and win the league with three games to spare.
USA: Bradley Wright-Phillips becomes the fastest player to score

Africa

MARK GLEESON

Same old story

Post-mortem highlights old excuses

A whitewashed beach resort on the coast of Morocco is where Africa retreated after a mauling at this summer's World Cup to conduct a post-mortem on the continent's worst return at the tournament since the 1982 finals in Spain.

Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia all failed to get past the group stage in Russia in a sobering reality check for the advancement of the game on the continent.

"Africa is perceived as a universal reservoir of talent and all the specialists seem to support the thesis that, technically, African players are among the best worldwide. So why such a rout?" bemoaned CAF president Ahmad as officials and coaches gathered to look for answers at a seminar in Rabat.

In the end, the two-day think-tank served only to turn the spotlight back on the age-old logistical problems that have bedeviled African football.

Coaches also blamed Ramadan and fasting in daylight hours for poor returns, along with injuries and too little preparation time, but none of these complaints are unique to Africa.

The five teams that went to Russia were better prepared and more organised than any other that had represented Africa before. There were no arguments over money (like Cameroon in Brazil four years ago) or jets flying over the ocean in the dead of night to deliver cash to appease striking players (see Ghana in Brazil four years ago). All the squads had sumptuous preparations – Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia in the Swiss Alps; Nigeria and Senegal in Austria – and all picked quality base camps in Russia.

These days African sides are so much better drilled, with the instinctive flair and trickery effectively coached out of their armoury. This was reflected in a plethora of mediocre match-ups and forgettable ties in the qualifying campaign. But while Africa cannot go back to days of maverick, unstructured play if it is to be competitive, following the trends have not helped much either.

CAF has suggested there is only one cure for the current malaise and promises an upcoming "a gigantic

Tough group... Morocco's Aziz Bouhaddouz

Minnows...fans watch World Cup games in Tunisia

100 MLS goals as New York Red Bulls win 1-0 away to DC United on his 159th appearance.

Thursday July 26

JAPAN: Hajime Moriyasu is named national coach.
UNDER-20 WORLD CUP: England will not defend their title in Poland next year after Norway win 3-0 in a Euro Under-19 play-off.
USA: Alphonso Davies joins Bayern Munich from Vancouver Whitecaps for an MLS record fee of $13m.

Play-off...Norway (in red) beat England

Friday July 27

BRAZIL: Palmeiras appoint former national boss Luiz Felipe Scolari as their coach for a third time.
RUSSIA: Stanislav Cherchesov signs a contract that could see him coach the national team until 2022.

Saturday July 28

MEXICO: Juan Carlos Osorio, who led the national side to the last 16 of the World Cup, rejects an ➤

project" with Ahmad talking of "development from grassroots to the top level, with a systematic evolution" – although he seems to be forgetting that Africa is not Germany, England or Holland, with ready-made facilities to implement programmes chosen for the collective good.

The development of the game is forged tightly in tandem with that of the society around it and there is no scope in the continent's current infrastructure for grandiose plans.

It can be argued that African football is going through something of a dearth of decent talent, without too many recognised stars and a lack of depth in its national teams.

While Mohamed Salah was feted for his season at Liverpool, and Sadio Mane too, the era of Samuel Eto'o, Didier Drogba, Michael Essien and others is at an end and replacements are not ready. There are not nearly as many African players at the top clubs and in the top leagues of Europe as was the case a decade ago.

If examined in more detail, Egypt were over reliant on Salah in qualifying for the first time in 28 years and his injury in the Champions League Final was a huge blow to their cause.

Morocco – arguably the best of Africa's five in Russia – were drawn into a very tough group with Portugal and Spain, yet acquitted themselves well, albeit losing the one game they should have won against Iran.

Nigeria were in the race for a second-round berth until the closing minutes of their last match against Argentina. Again, it was a tough group, containing Croatia and Iceland.

Tunisia, a country of just 11.5million inhabitants, punched above their weight just by qualifying and do not have the resources to do much more, while Senegal went out on yellow cards.

Morocco, Nigeria and Senegal have said that they will be keeping their coaches and perhaps that continuity could prove a turning point.

> "The strength of the big football nations is their ability to withstand shocks and overcome obstacles on their course to reach a bigger goal"
> Former Cameroon coach Hugo Broos

"The strength of the big football nations is their ability to withstand shocks and overcome obstacles on their course to reach a bigger goal," says Hugo Broos, who was fired less than a year after he won the last Nations Cup with Cameroon.

"Germany's patience with Joachim Low paid with victory in 2014 and Didier Deschamps was in the job six years before taking France to the title. But in African football there is far too much instability."

The bleak landscape can brighten up quickly if a new generation of talent suddenly emerges, coaches are given more time and the level of administration continues to improve.

Maybe as soon as Qatar in four years' time... WS

➤ offer from the Mexican Football Federation to extend his contract.
SOMALIA: Former national-team goalkeeper Ahmed Abdalla Moalim Mohamed dies after a protracted illness, aged 25.

Sunday July 29

ANGOLA: A 1-0 victory over South Africa sees Angola crowned COSAFA Under-17 champions.
EURO U19s: Portugal beat Italy 4-3 after extra-time in the Final to complete a unique under-17 and under-19 European double.
KUWAIT: Romeo Jozak agrees to coach Kuwait's national and Olympic squads, with the Croatian signing a two-year contract.
TUNISIA: Faouzi Benzarti is named national coach for a fourth time.
USA: Zlatan Ibrahimovic scores a hat-trick to make it 15 goals in 17 games for LA Galaxy as they beat Orlando City 4-3.

Monday July 30

GERMANY: Bayern Munich chief executive Karl-Heinz Rummenigge says the time has come to scrap Germany's 50+1 rule as it is making the country's club sides less competitive in terms of winning European trophies.

Tuesday July 31

ECUADOR: Hernan Dario Gomez, who was in charge of Panama at the World Cup, is appointed national coach of Ecuador.
IRAN: Yukiya Sugita will become the first Japanese to play in the Iran Pro League after the midfielder signs a deal with Tractor Sazi.
PERU: Chairman of the Peruvian Football Federation, Edwin Oviedo is under pressure to resign for offering illicit favours to a judge. Five members of the federation's consulting committee left after the allegations were made.
RUSSIA: Manchester United's chief scout Javier Ribalta agrees a deal to become Zenit's sporting director.

Wednesday August 1

ENGLAND: The FA says it will start work to see if a bid is feasible to host the 2030 World Cup.
FRANCE: Ex-Manchester City midfielder Samir Nasri has his ban for using a drip treatment at a Los Angeles clinic increased from six to 18 months.
SOUTH KOREA: Tottenham agree a compromise to release Son Heung-min for August's Asian Games in exchange for the striker missing South Korea's first two games at January's Asian Cup. WS

ASIA

JOHN DUERDEN

Local choice... Hajime Moriyasu

All eyes on UAE 2019

January's Asian Cup is new target for World Cup teams

Victorious...Saudi Arabia beat Egypt in Russia

The World Cup may be over but Asia's representatives started preparing for January's Asian Cup as soon as they returned home from Russia. And of the five teams involved this summer, only two can say with any confidence that they will have the same coach in charge when proceedings in the United Arab Emirates get underway.

Japan and Australia have already made the change. The former were the best of the continent's quintet in Russia and the only one to progress to the knockout stage, albeit by the narrowest of possible margins having received fewer yellow cards than Senegal.

Japan played some excellent football once in the last 16, only to lose 3-2 to Belgium in the last seconds, and were so impressive that there were calls for caretaker boss Akira Nishino, who replaced Vahid Halilhodzic in April, to stay on.

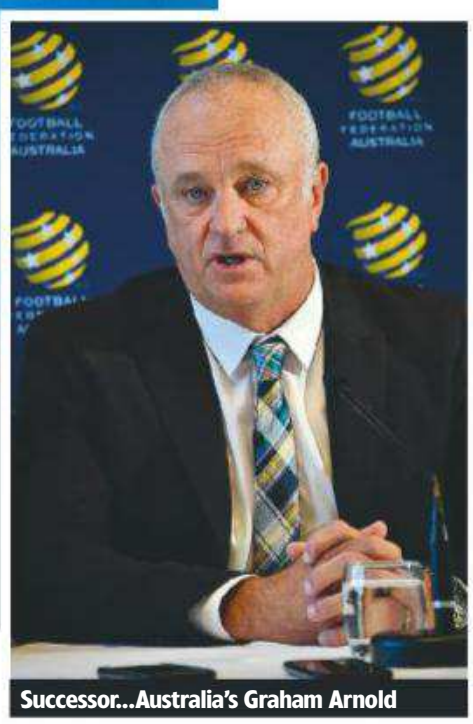
Nishino nevertheless stepped down at the end of July and, despite reports of Arsene Wenger returning 22 years after leaving Nagoya, the Japan Football Association wanted to keep local hands on the helm and appointed Hajime Moriyasu.

The 49-year-old was the prime local candidate and was not only assistant to Nishino in Russia but is also in charge of the under-23 team that is preparing for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

Moriyasu may have been dismissed by Sanfrecce Hiroshima in 2017 amid fears of relegation but his stock was still high after delivering three J.League titles for the club between 2012 and 2015.

As well as his domestic success, Moriyasu's appeal comes with being in charge of the younger team. With stalwarts such as Keisuke Honda and Makoto Hasebe stepping down from international duty, there will be opportunities for players to graduate upwards.

In Australia, Graham Arnold had known for some time that he would be taking over the national team. Bert Van Marwijk was appointed in February to take over from Ange Postecoglou just until the end of the World Cup, where the Socceroos managed only a single point.



Successor...Australia's Graham Arnold

Arnold struggled in his first spell in charge of the national team, having succeeded the very successful Guus Hiddink in 2006. But since a failure at the 2007 Asian Cup and his exit, Arnold has developed his reputation at home by making Sydney the best team in the A-League.

However, while Sydney have looked very good in Australia, they have performed less well in the Asian Champions League, and Arnold's short spell in charge of Japanese club Vegalta Sendai in 2014 did not go well either, so questions about his ability to deliver results in Asia remain.

The pressure will be on in January and, for better or worse, the current team does not have the stars of a decade ago. Tim Cahill, the last of the golden generation, announced his retirement after Russia but there should be enough in the defending continental champions for Arnold to work with.

Saudi Arabia, not usually a bastion of coaching stability, handed coach Juan Antonio Pizzi an extension up to the Asian Cup. The Argentinian, who took the job in November, was in real danger after the 5-0 thrashing by the hosts in the World Cup's opening match and Saudi journalists sitting in the post-match press conference speculated whether he would survive to the next game. He did and tightened things up to lose 1-0 to Uruguay and then beat Egypt in their final fixture.

Pizzi has been trying to introduce a more attack-minded approach to a team that had become pragmatic under previous boss Van Marwijk. The World Cup came too soon for that, but there is more time and perhaps lesser opposition for the Asian Cup for Pizzi, who arrived in Russia after just seven months in charge, to shine.

Carlos Queiroz has been in charge of Iran for seven years and the team received a warm welcome on their to Tehran after a best-ever World Cup haul of four points – which was very nearly enough to get out of a tough group containing Spain, Portugal and Morocco. The former Real Madrid boss has always had a fractious relationship with a federation that tolerates his barbs as long as he gets results. Queiroz is likely to stay on until January as Iran chase a first title since the 1970s.

South Korea's continental drought goes back to a decade before that. A momentous win over Germany in Kazan was not enough to disguise the disappointment of an early exit. Coach Shin Tae-yong was told that if he wanted a new contract he would be evaluated against foreign candidates.

As August arrived it was not looking good as his Russian performance was given low marks by the Korea FA. A new man could be in place for the friendlies in September, when preparations for the Asian Cup start in earnest. WS

Internationals

FRIENDLIES

Thursday, July 5
Jul 5 - Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia 1 (Syafiq 20)
Fiji 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 4,970

FRIENDLY FIXTURES (selected)

Thursday, September 6
Austria v Sweden
Holland v Peru
Portugal v Croatia
Friday, September 7
Japan v Chile
Mexico v Uruguay
Scotland v Belgium
United States v Brazil
Sunday, September 9
Germany v Peru
Monday, September 10
Russia v Czech Republic
Tuesday, September 11
Colombia v Argentina
England v Switzerland
Japan v Costa Rica
Northern Ireland v Israel
Poland v Republic of Ireland
United States v Mexico

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE

All group-stage fixtures to be played in 2018

League A

Group A1
Sep 6: Germany v France.
Sep 9: France v Holland.
Oct 13: Holland v Germany.
Oct 16: France v Germany.
Nov 16: Holland v France.
Nov 19: Germany v Holland.

Group A2
Sep 8: Switzerland v Iceland.
Sep 11: Iceland v Belgium.
Oct 12: Belgium v Switzerland.
Oct 15: Iceland v Switzerland.
Nov 15: Belgium v Iceland.
Nov 18: Switzerland v Belgium.

Group A3
Sep 7: Italy v Poland.
Sep 10: Portugal v Italy.
Oct 11: Poland v Portugal.
Oct 14: Poland v Italy.
Nov 17: Italy v Portugal.
Nov 20: Portugal v Poland.

Group A4
Sep 8: England v Spain.
Sep 11: Spain v Croatia.
Oct 12: Croatia v England.
Oct 15: Spain v England.
Nov 15: Croatia v Spain.
Nov 18: England v Croatia.

● *The 4 group winners qualify for the Nations League finals*
● *The country placed bottom in each group will be relegated to League B for the 2020 Nations League tournament*
● *The 4 countries with the best record in the League A group stage that have not already qualified for the 2020 European Championship finals will go into play-offs, to be played in March 2020, to try to win the one place on offer (via the League A play-offs route) at the Euro 2020 finals*

Nations League finals

(to be staged by one of the participating countries)
Semi-finals
Jun 5 & 6, 2019

3rd-place match
Jun 9, 2019

Final
Jun 9, 2019

League B

Group B1
Sep 6: Czech Republic v Ukraine.
Sep 9: Ukraine v Slovakia.
Oct 13: Slovakia v Czech Republic.
Oct 16: Ukraine v Czech Republic.
Nov 16: Slovakia v Ukraine.
Nov 19: Czech Republic v Slovakia.

Group B2
Sep 7: Turkey v Russia.
Sep 10: Sweden v Turkey.
Oct 11: Russia v Sweden.
Oct 14: Russia v Turkey.
Nov 17: Turkey v Sweden.
Nov 20: Sweden v Russia.

Group B3
Sep 8: Northern Ireland v Bosnia-Herzegovina.
Sep 11: Bosnia-Herzegovina v Austria.
Oct 12: Austria v Northern Ireland.
Oct 15: Bosnia-Herzegovina v Northern Ireland.
Nov 15: Austria v Bosnia-Herzegovina.
Nov 18: Northern Ireland v Austria.

Group B4
Sep 6: Wales v Republic of Ireland.
Sep 9: Denmark v Wales.
Oct 13: Republic of Ireland v Denmark.
Oct 16: Republic of Ireland v Wales.
Nov 16: Wales v Denmark.
Nov 19: Denmark v Republic of Ireland.

● *The 4 group winners will be promoted to League A for the 2020 Nations League tournament*
● *The country placed bottom in each group will be relegated to League C for the 2020 Nations League tournament*
● *The 4 countries with the best record in the League B group stage that have not already qualified for the 2020 European Championship finals will go into play-offs, to be played in March 2020, to try to win the one place on offer (via the League B play-offs route) at the Euro 2020 finals*

League C

Group C1
Sep 7: Albania v Israel.
Sep 10: Scotland v Albania.
Oct 11: Israel v Scotland.
Oct 14: Israel v Albania.
Nov 17: Albania v Scotland.
Nov 20: Scotland v Israel.

Group C2
Sep 8: Estonia v Greece; Finland v Hungary.
Sep 11: Finland v Estonia; Hungary v Greece.
Oct 12: Estonia v Finland; Greece v Hungary.
Oct 15: Estonia v Hungary; Finland v Greece.
Nov 15: Greece v Finland; Hungary v Estonia.
Nov 18: Greece v Estonia; Hungary v Finland.

Group C3
Sep 6: Norway v Cyprus; Slovenia v Bulgaria.
Sep 9: Bulgaria v Norway; Cyprus v Slovenia.
Oct 13: Bulgaria v Cyprus; Norway v Slovenia.
Oct 16: Norway v Bulgaria; Slovenia v Cyprus.
Nov 16: Cyprus v Bulgaria; Slovenia v Norway.
Nov 19: Bulgaria v Slovenia; Cyprus v Norway.

Group C4
Sep 7: Lithuania v Serbia; Romania v Montenegro.
Sep 10: Montenegro v Lithuania; Serbia v Romania.
Oct 11: Lithuania v Romania; Montenegro v Serbia.
Oct 14: Lithuania v Montenegro; Romania v Serbia.
Nov 17: Romania v Lithuania; Serbia v Montenegro.
Nov 20: Montenegro v Romania; Serbia v Lithuania.

● *The 4 group winners will be promoted to League B for the 2020 Nations League tournament*
● *The country placed bottom in groups C2, C3 & C4 plus the lowest-ranked 3rd-placed team from groups C1, C2, C3 & C4 (based on their group-stage performance) will be relegated to League D for the 2020 Nations League tournament*
● *The 4 countries with the best record in the League C group stage that have not already qualified for the 2020 European Championship finals will go into play-offs, to be played in March 2020, to try to win the one place on offer (via the League C play-offs route) at the Euro 2020 finals*

League D

Group D1
Sep 6: Kazakhstan v Georgia; Latvia v Andorra.
Sep 9: Georgia v Latvia.
Sep 10: Andorra v Kazakhstan.
Oct 13: Georgia v Andorra; Latvia v Kazakhstan.
Oct 16: Kazakhstan v Andorra; Latvia v Georgia.
Nov 15: Andorra v Georgia; Kazakhstan v Latvia.
Nov 19: Andorra v Latvia; Georgia v Kazakhstan.

Group D2
Sep 8: Belarus v S Marino; Lux'bourg v Moldova.
Sep 11: Moldova v Belarus; S Marino v Lux'bourg.
Oct 12: Belarus v Lux'bourg; Moldova v S Marino.
Oct 15: Belarus v Moldova; Lux'bourg v S Marino.
Nov 15: Lux'bourg v Belarus; S Marino v Moldova.
Nov 18: Moldova v Lux'bourg; S Marino v Belarus.

Group D3
Sep 7: Azerbaijan v Kosovo; Faroe Is v Malta.
Sep 10: Kosovo v Faroe Is; Malta v Azerbaijan.
Oct 11: Faroe Is v Azerbaijan; Kosovo v Malta.
Oct 14: Azerbaijan v Malta; Faroe Is v Kosovo.
Nov 17: Azerbaijan v Faroe Is; Malta v Kosovo.
Nov 20: Kosovo v Azerbaijan; Malta v Faroe Is.

Group D4
Sep 6: Armenia v Liech'stein; Gibraltar v Maced'ia.
Sep 9: Liech'stein v Gibraltar; Maced'ia v Armenia.
Oct 13: Armenia v Gibraltar; Maced'ia v Liech'stein.
Oct 16: Armenia v Maced'ia; Gibraltar v Liech'stein.
Nov 16: Gibraltar v Armenia; Liech'stein v Maced'ia.
Nov 19: Liech'stein v Armenia; Maced'ia v Gibraltar.

● *The 4 group winners will be promoted to League C for the 2020 Nations League tournament*
● *The 4 countries with the best record in the League D group stage that have not already qualified for the 2020 European Championship finals will go into play-offs, to be played in March 2020, to try to win the one place on offer (via the League D play-offs route) at the Euro 2020 finals*

European Championship qualifiers

● *20 teams will qualify for the Euro 2020 finals via that tournament's qualifiers (which begin in March 2019); the other 4 finals places will go to the winner of the play-offs in each of the 4 Nations League sections*

2019 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS

2nd of 6 rounds of qualifiers – all Sep 7, 2018
Gp A: Equatorial Guinea v Sudan; Madagascar v Senegal.
Gp B: Comoros v Cameroon; Morocco v Malawi.
Gp C: Gabon v Burundi; South Sudan v Mali.
Gp D: Gambia v Algeria; Togo v Benin.
Gp E: Seychelles v Nigeria; South Africa v Libya.
Gp F: Ethiopia v Sierra Leone; Kenya v Ghana.
Gp G: Congo v Zimbabwe; Liberia v DR Congo.
Gp H: Guinea v Central African Republic; Rwanda v Ivory Coast.
Gp I: Angola v Botswana; Mauritania v Burkina Faso.
Gp J: Egypt v Niger; Swaziland v Tunisia.
Gp K: Mozambique v Guinea-Bissau; Namibia v Zambia.
Gp L: Lesotho v Cape Verde; Uganda v Tanzania.

AFF CHAMPIONSHIP (Suzuki Cup)

(ASEAN Football Federation)

Qualifying tie
East Timor v Brunei
1st leg - Sep1; 2nd leg - Sep 8
● *The winner qualifies for the finals*

Finals match schedule

Group A
Nov 8: Cambodia v Malaysia; Laos v Vietnam.
Nov 12: Malaysia v Laos; Myanmar v Cambodia.
Nov 16: Laos v Myanmar; Vietnam v Malaysia.
Nov 20: Myanmar v Vietnam; Cambodia v Laos.
Nov 24: Vietnam v Cambodia; Malaysia v Myan'r.

Group B
Nov 9: Singapore v Indonesia; East Timor OR Brunei v Thailand.
Nov 13: Indonesia v East Timor OR Brunei; Philippines v Singapore.
Nov 17: East Timor OR Brunei v Philippines; Thailand v Indonesia.
Nov 21: Philippines v Thailand; Singapore v East Timor OR Brunei.
Nov 25: Thailand v Singapore; Indonesia v Philippines.

● *The top 2 in both groups qualify for the semi-finals*

Semi-finals
B 1st v A 2nd
1st leg - Dec1; 2nd leg - Dec 5
A 1st v B 2nd
1st leg - Dec 2; 2nd leg - Dec 6

Final
1st leg - Dec11; 2nd leg - Dec15

2019 ASIAN CUP FINALS

To be played in the United Arab Emirates

Match schedule

Group A
Jan 5 UAE v Bahrain (Abu Dhabi)
Jan 6 Thailand v India (Abu Dhabi)
Jan 10 Bahrain v Thailand (Dubai)
India v UAE (Abu Dhabi)
Jan 14 UAE v Thailand (Al Ain)
India v Bahrain (Sharjah)

Group B
Jan 6 Australia v Jordan (Al Ain)
Syria v Palestine (Sharjah)
Jan 10 Jordan v Syria (Al Ain)
Jan 11 Palestine v Australia (Dubai)
Jan 15 Australia v Syria (Al Ain)
Palestine v Jordan (Abu Dhabi)

Group C
Jan 7 China v Kyrgyzstan (Al Ain)
South Korea v Philippines (Dubai)
Jan 11 Philippines v China (Abu Dhabi)
Kyrgyzstan v South Korea (Al Ain)
Jan 16 South Korea v China (Abu Dhabi)
Kyrgyzstan v Philippines (Dubai)

Group D
Jan 7 Iran v Yemen (Abu Dhabi)
Jan 8 Iraq v Vietnam (Abu Dhabi)
Jan 12 Vietnam v Iran (Abu Dhabi)
Yemen v Iraq (Sharjah)
Jan 16 Vietnam v Yemen (Al Ain)
Iran v Iraq (Dubai)

Group E
Jan 8 Saudi Arabia v North Korea (Dubai)
Jan 9 Qatar v Lebanon (Al Ain)
Jan 12 Lebanon v Saudi Arabia (Dubai)
Jan 13 North Korea v Qatar (Al Ain)
Jan 17 Saudi Arabia v Qatar (Abu Dhabi)
Lebanon v North Korea (Sharjah)

Group F
Jan 9 Japan v Turkmenistan (Abu Dhabi)
Uzbekistan v Oman (Sharjah)
Jan 13 Oman v Japan (Abu Dhabi)
Turkmenistan v Uzbekistan (Dubai)
Jan 17 Oman v Turkmenistan (Abu Dhabi)
Japan v Uzbekistan (Al Ain)

● *The top 2 in each group and the 4 3rd-placed countries with the best record will qualify for the 1st knockout round (last16)*

1st knockout round (last 16)
Jan 20 B 1st v A/C/D 3rd (Dubai) (1KR1)
A 2nd v C 2nd (Al Ain) (1KR2)
D 1st v B/E/F 3rd (Abu Dhabi) (1KR3)
Jan 21 F 1st v E 2nd (Sharjah) (1KR4)
B 2nd v F 2nd (Al Ain) (1KR5)
A 1st v C/D/E 3rd (Abu Dhabi) (1KR6)
Jan 22 C 1st v A/B/F 3rd (Dubai) (1KR7)
E 1st v D 2nd (Abu Dhabi) (1KR8)

Quarter-finals
Jan 24 1KR1 v 1KR4 (Dubai) (QF1)
1KR2 v 1KR3 (Abu Dhabi) (QF2)
Jan 25 1KR7 v 1KR8 (Abu Dhabi) (QF3)
1KR6 v 1KR5 (Al Ain) (QF4)

Semi-finals
Jan 28 QF2 v QF1 (Al Ain)
Jan 29 QF3 v QF4 (Abu Dhabi)

Final
Feb 1 (Abu Dhabi)

● *All fixtures subject to change*

Club football

EUROPE

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st qualifying round

1st legs - Jul10/11; 2nd legs - Jul17/18

Alashkert (Arm) v Celtic (Sco) 0-3, 0-3 (agg 0-6); Astana (Kaz) v Sutjeska (Mne) 1-0, 2-0 (agg 3-0); Cork City (RoI) v Legia Warsaw (Pol) 0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4); Drita (Kos) v Malmo (Swe) 0-3, 0-2 (agg 0-5); F91 Dudelange (Lux) v Vidi (Hun) 1-1, 1-2 (agg 2-3); Flora Tallinn (Est) v Hapoel Beer Sheva (Isr) 1-4, 1-3 (agg 2-7); Kukesi (Alb) v Valletta (Mlt) 0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1, Kukesi on away goals); Ludogorets (Bul) v Crusaders (NI) 7-0, 2-0 (agg 9-0); Olimpija Ljubljana (Sln) v Qarabag (Aze) 0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1); Shkendija (Mac) v The New Saints (Wal) 5-0, 0-4 (agg 5-4); Spartak Trnava (Slk) v Zrinjski (Bos) 1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1); Spartaks Jurmala (Lat) v Red Star Belgrade (Ser) 0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2); Suduva (Lit) v APOEL (Cyp) 3-1, 0-1 (agg 3-2); Torpedo Kutaisi (Geo) v Sheriff (Mol) 2-1, 0-3 (agg 2-4); Valur (Ice) v Rosenborg (Nor) 1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3); Vikingur (Far) v HJK Helsinki (Fin) 1-2, 1-3 (agg 2-5)

● *Losing teams enter Europa League*

EUROPA LEAGUE

1st qualifying round

1st legs - Jul11/12; 2nd legs - Jul17/19

Anorthosis (Cyp) v Laci (Alb) 2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2, Laci on away goals); B36 (Far) v Titograd (Mne) 0-0, 2-1 (agg 2-1); Balzan (Mlt) v Kesla (Aze) 4-1, 1-2 (agg 5-3); Banants (Arm) v Sarajevo (Bos) 1-2, 0-3 (agg 1-5); Buducnost (Mne) v Trencin (Slk) 0-2, 1-1 (agg 1-3); Chikhura (Geo) v Beitar Jerusalem (Isr) 0-0, 2-1 (agg 2-1); Cliftonville (NI) v Nordsjaelland (Den) 0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3); Connah's Quay Nomads (Wal) v Shakhtyor (Bls) 1-3, 0-2 (agg 1-5); CSKA Sofia (Bul) v Riga FC (Lat) 1-0, 0-1 (aet) (agg 1-1, CSKA Sofia 5-3 on pens); Derry City (RoI) v Dinamo Minsk (Bls) 0-2, 2-1 (agg 2-3); Dunajska Streda (Slk) v Dinamo Tbilisi (Geo) 1-1, 2-1 (agg 3-2); Engordany (And) v Kairat (Kaz) 0-3, 1-7 (agg 1-10); FCI Levadia (Est) v Dundalk (RoI) 0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3); Ferencvaros (Hun) v Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr) 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2); Fola Esch (Lux) v Prishtina (Kos) 0-0, 0-0 (aet) (agg 0-0, Fola Esch 5-4 on pens); Glenavon (NI) v Molde (Nor) 2-1, 1-5 (agg 3-6); Gornik Zabrze (Pol) v Zaria (Mol) 1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1); Hibernian (Sco) v NSI (Far) 6-1, 6-4 (agg 12-5); IBV (Ice) v Sarpsborg (Nor) 0-4, 0-2 (agg 0-6); Ilves (Fin) v Slavia Sofia (Bul) 0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3); KI (Far) v Zalgiris (Lit) 1-2, 1-1 (agg 2-3); KuPS (Fin) v Copenhagen (Den) 0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2); Lahti (Fin) v FH (Ice) 0-3, 0-0 (agg 0-3); Lech Poznan (Pol) v Gandzasar (Arm) 2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2); Liepaja (Lat) v Hacken (Swe) 0-3, 2-1 (agg 2-4); Milsami (Mol) v Slovan Bratislava (Slk) 2-4, 0-5 (agg 2-9); Neftchi (Aze) v Ujpest (Hun) 3-1, 0-4 (agg 3-5); Partizani (Alb) v Maribor (Sln) 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3); Petrocub (Mol) v Osijek (Cro) 1-1, 1-2 (agg 2-3); Pyunik (Arm) v Vardar Skopje (Mac) 1-0, 2-0 (agg 3-0); Qabala (Aze) v Progres Niederkorn (Lux) 0-2, 1-0 (agg 1-2); Rabotnicki (Mac) v Honved (Hun) 2-1, 0-4 (agg 2-5); Racing (Lux) v Viitorul (Rom) 0-2, 0-0 (agg 0-2); Radnicki Nis (Ser) v Gzira United (Mlt) 4-0, 1-0 (agg 5-0); Rangers (Sco) v Shkupi (Mac) 2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0); Rudar Pljevlja (Mne) v Partizan Belgrade (Ser) 0-3, 0-3 (agg 0-6); Rudar Velenje (Sln) v Tre Fiori (SaM) 7-0, 3-0 (agg 10-0); Samtredia (Geo) v Tobol (Kaz) 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3); Shamrock Rovers (RoI) v AIK (Swe) 0-1, 1-1 (aet) (agg 1-2); Siroki Brijeg (Bos) v Domzale (Sln) 2-2, 1-1 (agg 3-3, Domzale on away goals); Spartak Subotica (Ser) v Coleraine (NI) 1-1, 2-0 (agg 3-1); Stjarnan (Ice) v Nomme Kalju (Est) 3-0, 0-1 (agg 3-1); Stumbras (Lit) v Apollon (Cyp) 1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2); Trakai (Lit) v Irtysh (Kaz) 0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0); Trans Narva (Est) v Zeljeznicar (Bos) 0-2, 1-3 (agg 1-5); Vaduz (Lie) v Levski Sofia (Bul) 1-0, 2-3 (agg 3-3, Vaduz on away goals); Ventspils (Lat) v Luftetari (Alb) 5-0, 3-3 (agg 8-3)

CONCACAF

ANGUILLA

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kicks Utd (C)	7	7	0	0	19	2	21
Roaring Lions	7	5	0	2	25	4	15
Enforcers	7	4	1	2	21	6	13
Salsa Ballers	7	4	1	2	13	7	13
Up Rising	7	2	0	5	7	30	6
Diamond	7	1	2	4	8	19	5
ALHCS Spartan[1]	6	1	1	4	9	17	4
Dock's United[1]	6	0	1	5	6	23	1

[1]Remaining game not played

ARUBA

2017-18 Championship Final

1st leg - Jun 27; 2nd leg - Jul 3

Deportivo Nacional v Dakota 0-0, 2-4

Dakota won with 4pts to Deportivo Nacional's 1pt

BARBADOS

2018 Championship Final

Jul 8: Weymouth Wales 2 BDF 1.

CURACAO

2017-18 Championship Final

Jul 8: Jong Holland 1 SV VESTA 0.

FRENCH GUIANA

2017-18 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
Le Geldar (C)	24	17	5	2	61	24	80
Etoile	24	17	4	3	49	24	79
US Matoury[2]	24	13	7	4	40	19	69
Agouado	24	11	5	8	53	41	62
Grand Santi[3]	24	11	4	9	39	33	59
Sinnamary[2]	24	10	6	8	39	35	59
Saint-Georges	24	9	5	10	41	42	56
CSC Cayenne	24	8	6	10	27	35	54
Kourou	24	8	5	11	29	38	53
Remire	24	8	5	11	47	38	53
Olympique	24	7	2	15	24	43	47
Iracoubo[2]	24	4	3	17	15	60	38
Kouroucien[2]	24	2	5	17	18	50	34

[1]4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a defeat
[2]1pt deducted
[3]2pts deducted

SURINAM

2017-18 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Robinhood (C)	24	17	6	1	74	27	57
Transvaal	24	16	4	4	52	25	52
Notch	24	16	4	4	50	24	52
Inter M'poe	24	13	4	7	55	24	43
WBC	24	13	3	8	53	43	42
Leo Victor	24	11	6	7	38	24	39
PVV	24	10	5	9	47	50	35
Botopasi	24	9	4	11	41	55	31
Voorwaarts	24	8	4	12	35	43	28
West United	24	8	0	16	34	51	24
Papatam[1]	24	5	1	18	27	73	13
Nishan 42[1]	24	4	3	17	32	63	12
SNL	24	3	2	19	21	57	11

[1]3pts deducted

AFRICA

DR CONGO

2017-18 – CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AS Vita (C)	22	18	2	2	55	9	56
TP Mazembe	22	16	5	1	39	5	53
Motema P'be	22	16	2	4	45	12	50
Sanga Balende	22	15	4	3	42	7	49
St Eloi Lupopo	22	9	6	7	23	21	33
Maniema Union	22	10	3	9	28	25	33
Don Bosco	22	6	5	11	18	34	23
Mont Bleu	22	6	4	12	21	34	22
AC Rangers	22	5	2	15	16	42	17
Groupe Bazano	22	4	4	14	12	43	16
Dauphin Noir	22	3	3	16	8	44	12
Dragons/Bilima	22	2	4	16	14	45	10

ETHIOPIA

2017-18 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jimma AJ (C)	30	15	10	5	39	15	55
St George	30	14	13	3	40	19	55
Ethiop Coffee	30	14	8	8	38	22	50
Mekelle	30	13	10	7	26	16	49
Adama City	30	11	11	8	32	26	44
Dedebit	30	11	8	11	36	31	41
Fasil City	30	10	11	9	22	28	41
Sidama Coffee	30	9	11	10	30	33	38
Awassa City	30	8	12	10	27	33	36
Dire Dawa	30	7	14	9	16	17	35
Welayta Dicha	30	8	11	11	25	27	35
Defence Force	30	9	8	13	23	26	35
Welwalo A Uni	30	8	11	11	22	32	35
EEPCO (R)	30	9	8	13	32	47	35
Arba Minch (R)	30	8	9	13	25	32	33
Woldya (R)	30	4	9	17	14	43	21

GABON

2018 Championship Final

Jun 13: CMS 0 Mangasport 2.

TOGO

2017-18 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Koroki (C)	30	17	7	6	28	13	58
Gomido	30	15	11	4	39	17	56
Semassi	30	16	7	7	38	20	55
Togo Port	30	15	7	8	38	26	52
Dynamic Tog's	30	13	8	9	39	29	47
OTR	30	13	7	10	37	29	46
ASC Kara	30	12	8	10	35	30	44
Maranatha	30	12	8	10	31	29	44
Anges	30	12	4	14	23	30	40
Gbikinti	30	7	16	7	26	25	37
ASKO	30	10	5	15	24	35	35
Foadan	30	8	9	13	20	26	33
Unisport (R)	30	7	10	13	24	33	31
Espoir (R)	30	7	10	13	22	34	31
Agaza (R)	30	6	8	16	17	35	26
Kotoko (R)	30	3	9	18	15	45	18

SOUTH AMERICA

ECUADOR

2018 – 1ST STAGE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LDU Quito (Q)	22	14	4	4	32	18	46
Barcelona	22	13	6	3	41	21	45
Univ Catolica	22	11	5	6	40	28	38
Emelec	22	11	4	7	34	27	37
Delfin	22	10	3	9	35	34	33
Independiente	22	9	4	9	30	27	31
Aucas	22	6	11	5	25	18	29
Macara	22	7	6	9	25	29	27
El Nacional	22	6	5	11	24	35	23
Cuenca	22	5	7	10	21	33	22
Guayaquil City	22	3	7	12	15	28	16
Tecnico Univ	22	3	6	13	15	39	15

As winners, LDU Quito qualify for the 2018 Championship Final

ASIA

IRAQ

2017-18 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Zawra'a (C)	38	26	10	2	66	26	88
Quwa Jawiya	38	25	9	4	66	23	84
Al Naft	38	24	12	2	59	20	84
Al Shorta	38	24	11	3	69	24	83
Al Kahrabaa	38	15	13	10	39	30	58
Al Najaf	38	13	16	9	50	40	55
Baghdad SC	38	14	11	13	31	34	53
Naft Maysan	38	13	10	15	45	36	49
Naft Al Wasat	38	10	19	9	42	38	49
Naft Al Janoob	38	12	13	13	34	41	49
Sinaat K'baiya	38	12	11	15	46	46	47
Al Samawa	38	11	11	16	42	50	44
Al Hudod	38	11	10	17	40	45	43
Al Talaba	38	11	10	17	43	59	43
Al Mina'a	38	8	17	13	34	47	41
Al Bahri	38	8	14	16	41	55	38
Al Diwaniya	38	7	10	21	32	58	31
Al Hussein	38	5	12	21	26	58	27
Karbala'a (R)	38	7	6	25	26	76	27
Zakho[1] (R)	38	5	13	20	27	52	25

[1]3pts deducted

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions (R) = relegated
(Q) = qualified for next stage

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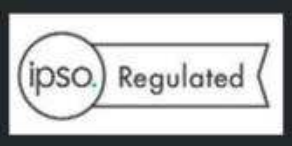

Most recent...Fenerbahce's Fernandao is denied by Gala keeper Fernando Muslera

GALATASARAY v FENERBAHCE

The inter-continental derby

They may be situated just a few miles apart, on either side of Istanbul's Bosporus strait, but Turkish football's two biggest and most successful clubs are actually in different continents.

Founded in 1905 by students of the 400-year-old Galatasaray High School, Gala are notionally the team of the European elite, while Fener are representative of an ambitious, prosperous Asian Turkey.

These days, however, the intense rivalry between the pair has very little to do with cultural or religious affiliations and both clubs draw huge support from all over the country and far beyond.

Only five sides have ever won the Turkish Super Lig, with Galatasaray currently edging Fenerbahce 21-19 – while Besiktas (15), Trabzonspor (6) and Bursaspor (1) the only other sides to have been crowned champions. Gala are also very proud of being the only Turkish team to have won a major European competition, lifting the UEFA Cup in 2000.

One of the fiercest derbies in the world, it takes very little to fire up the passions of either side on match day. Yet, in 1996, a Scotsman actually managed to increase the temperature a degree or two higher than usual, as Graeme Souness – then Galatasaray coach – ran onto the pitch at Fenerbahce's Sukru Saracoglu Stadium and planted a huge Gala flag in the centre circle at the end of the Turkish Cup Final. The provocative gesture almost caused a riot as home fans tried to get onto the pitch.

Depending on which side your loyalties lie, to this day Souness is either a hero or the arch-villain to football fans in the city. WS

Heated...it's a passionate affair

ON BOTH SIDES

MUSTAFA DENIZLI
- 1987-89, 1990-92 & 2015-16 (coach)
- 2000-01 (coach)

EMRE BELOZOGLU
- 1992-2001
- 2008-12 & 2013-15

MEHMET TOPAL
- 2006-10
- 2012-present

COLIN KAZIM-RICHARDS
- 2007-11
- 2011-13

BURAK YILMAZ
- 2008-10
- 2012-16

CLASSIC ENCOUNTERS

1909 Jan 17
The first game between the two sides was a friendly, played at Papazin Cayiri – where Sukru Saracoglu Stadium is located today – and Galatasaray won 2-0.

1934 Feb 23
A supposed friendly match at Taksim Stadium was abandoned when fighting broke out between players from both sides – and relations between the two clubs have remained frosty ever since.

2002 Nov 6
Fenerbahce scored four goals when reduced to 10 men and inflicted their heaviest defeat of all time on their rivals, winning 6-0.

2003 Sep 21
A 2-2 draw at Galatasaray's Ali Sami Yen Stadium attracted a Super Lig record attendance of 71,334.

Record ...the 2-2 draw in 2003

2018 Mar 17
The 387th meeting between the two sides ended in a 0-0 draw, which means Fener have now won 146 games to Gala's 123, with 118 draws

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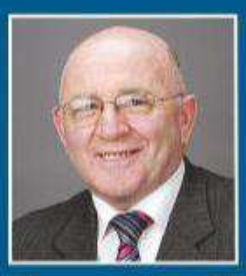

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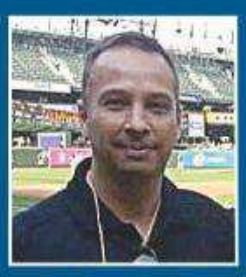

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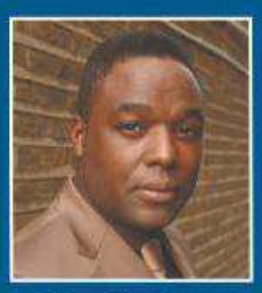
FIFA Agent



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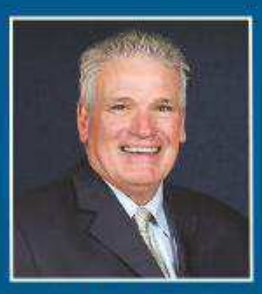

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